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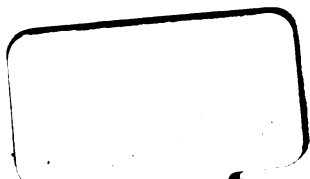
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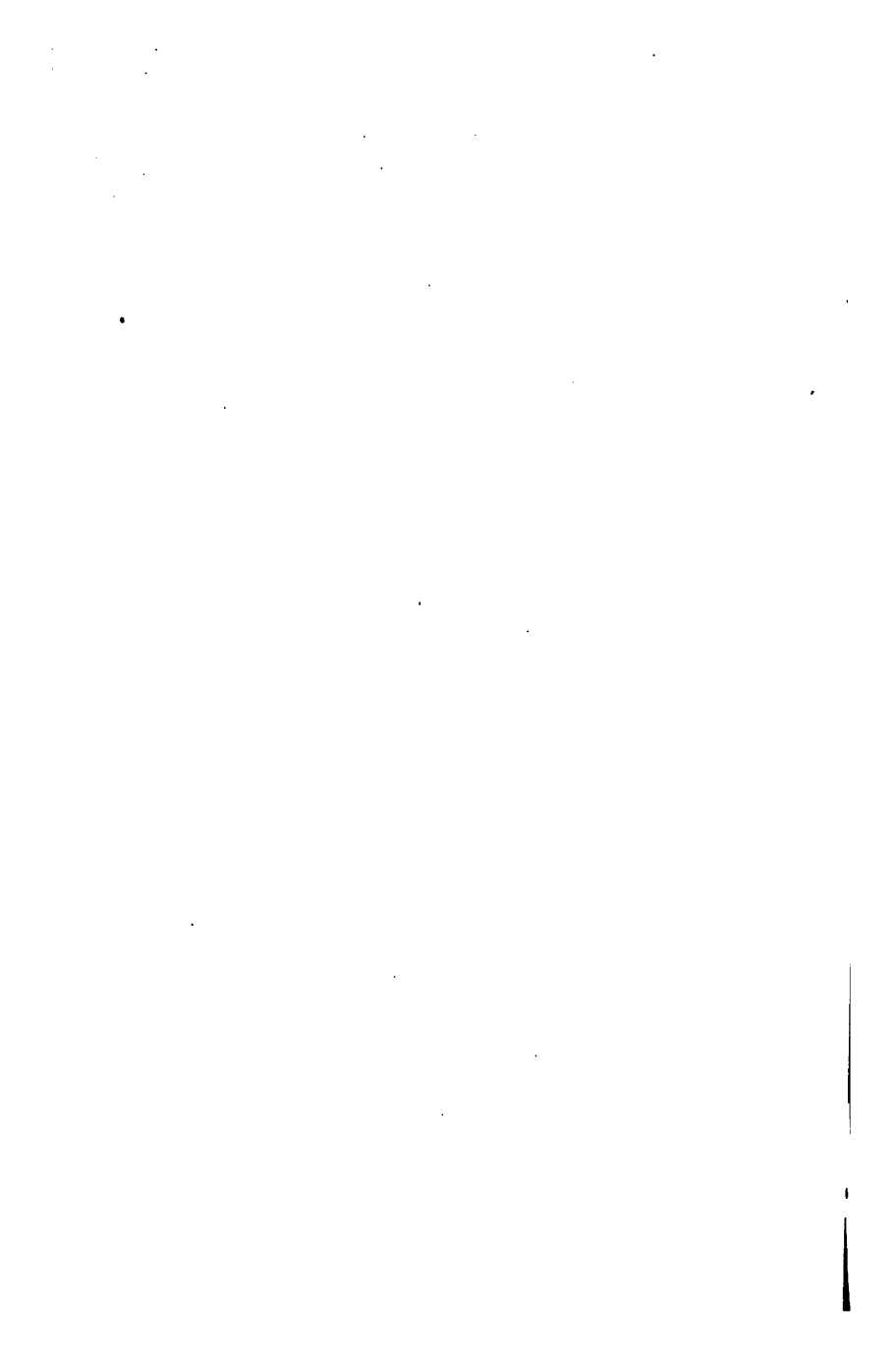
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A
DISCOURSE ON DEATH;
WITH
APPLICATIONS
OF
CHRISTIAN DOCTRINE.



BY THE

REV. HENRY STEBBING, M. A.

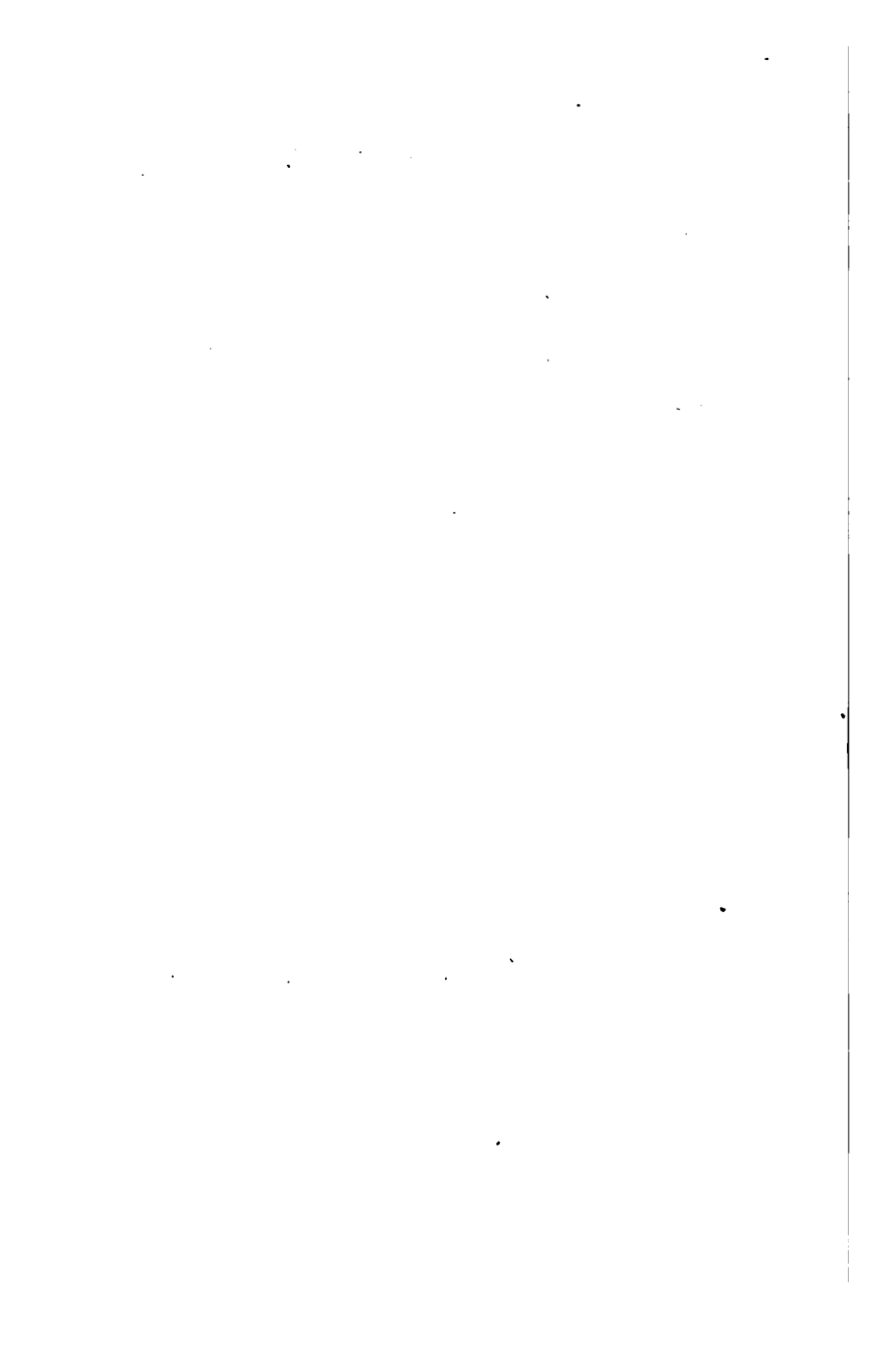
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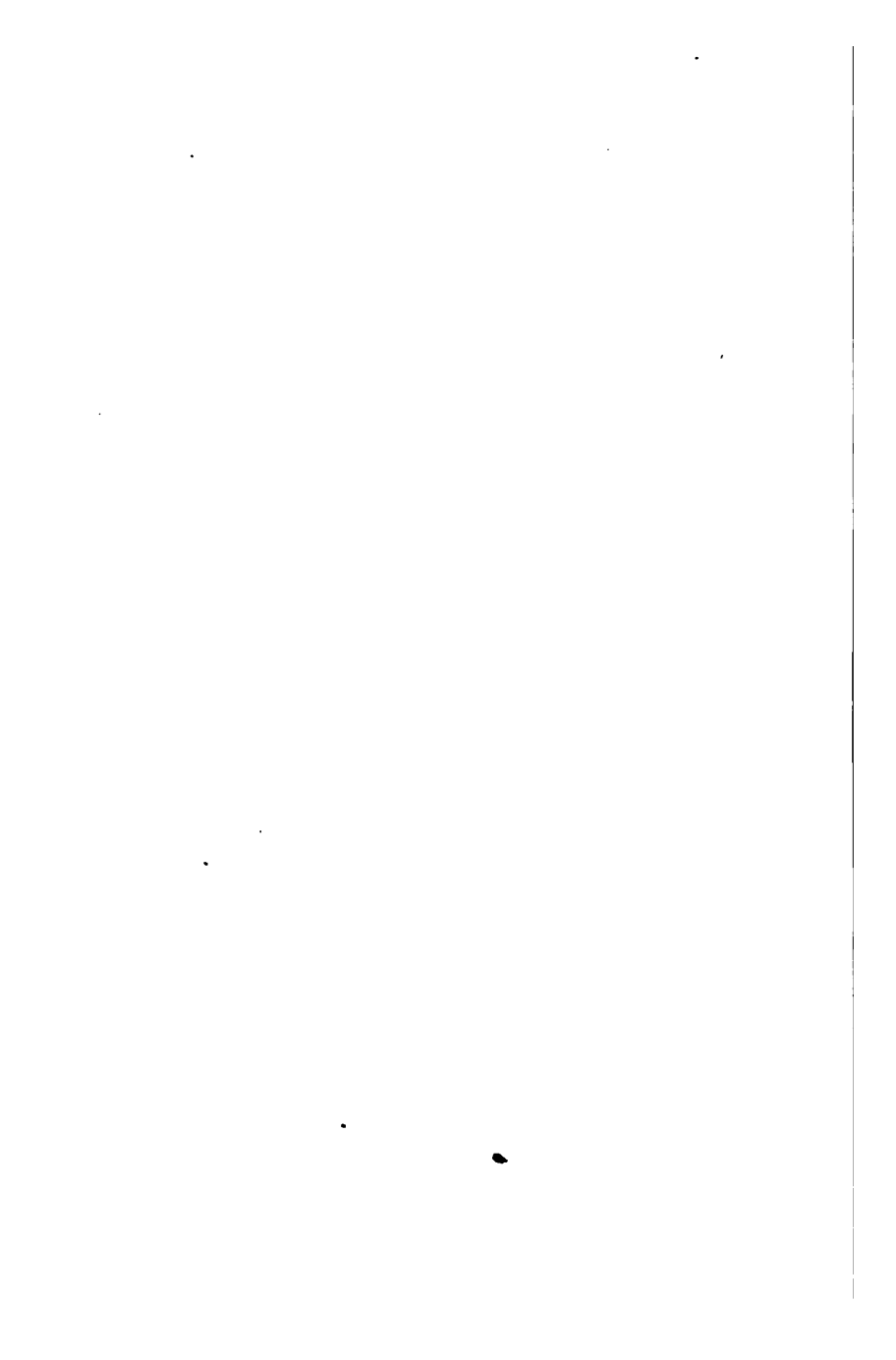
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To the Memory
OF
HIS FATHER,
THIS DISCOURSE IS DEDICATED,
AS A
MEMORIAL
OF THE
AUTHOR'S FILIAL LOVE AND REVERENCE.



A small portion of the following DISCOURSE
was prefixed to the edition of "Baxter's Dying
Thoughts," in the "SACRED CLASSICS;" and the
commendations which were kindly bestowed upon
the part which thus appeared, have encouraged
the Author to publish the Treatise entire.



CONTENTS.

	Page.
On the Necessity of Preparation	1
On the Nature of Death	26
On the Resurrection of the Body	49
A View of Christian Doctrine in reference to the Subject .	63
Applications of Christian Doctrine	92
Personal Sanctification	118
The Judgment	140
Conclusion	165



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the very hope of the most desperate is not that death may be escaped, but that he is eternal; and all that either the young, the careless, or the dissipated can do, is to think of him as seldom as they can. No man, therefore, will deny that whatever can be said of death is applicable to himself. The bell which he hears tolled may never toll for him; there may be no friend or children left to lament him; he may not have to lie through long and anxious days, looking for the coming of the expected terror: but he knows he must die: he knows that in whatever quarter of the world he abides—whatever may be his circumstances—however strong his present hold of life—however unlike the prey of death he looks—that it is his doom, beyond reverse, to die. But if it be thus certain that death is the common lot of all—the great result of life—it must surely be the part of a rational creature like man to inquire, what is death? and having answered this question, to consider what kind of preparation should be made for his approach, and by what considerations his terrors are most likely to be diminished. These inquiries I take for the subject of the present Discourse, and may the Almighty Spirit of the Lord so assist both the reader and me, that our hearts may gain wisdom in this matter; and that, having laid the foundation of sober thought, we may, in our subsequent reflections, be enabled to rise gradually to the contem-

plation of those mysteries by which death himself shall be conquered, and the grave deprived of its strength.

What then is death? We will consider it first in its simplest and most obvious character; that is as the contrary of animal life. 'To breathe, to move, to communicate with the outward world, to receive impressions from the various objects it contains, is to live; to cease to breathe, to move, to manifest any consciousness of outward things, is to die. Now, if we suppose for the moment that we have no other principle of life but this of the animal, its destruction is the termination of our being; and when we cease to breathe, the plan and measure of our existence are complete. But if death were really the termination of existence, would it thence follow that no thought is necessary to prepare for meeting it? I think not; and for these reasons:—Every creature that exists, has its being for some particular end; and a conscious, rational being, is superior to those of all other classes, because he has the ability of discerning several of the purposes of his existence, and the relation in which he stands to the world at large. But since death completes the measurement of life—since it terminates the course in which the manifold objects and purposes of rational existence are to be accomplished, it is manifestly the duty of every man to take care that it catches him not unprepared; that

when it arrives he has no work of importance left undone, which could have been done by prudence and reflection. For conscience tells us, independently of any other tribunal, that our being, our hearts and minds, should be continually advancing towards maturity; that they should manifest the ripening effects of experience and thought; that the work of each day should be complete when the day closes, and that the sum of our finished duties should equal the sum of our years, when death comes and says, the account is closed. To deny this principle—to suppose that man is not responsible to himself, to the world, to nature, for the completion of the purposes of existence—would be to do away with the foundation of many noble qualities in our constitution: it would be to contradict the maxims from which sprung some of the finest examples of human virtue, sublime, though imperfect, in the unenlightened days of antiquity. Confidently, therefore, may we state, that even supposing death to be the utter extinction of our being, a preparation for it is demanded of every rational creature,—a preparation consisting in such continual observations on the purposes of life, in such careful comparisons of the progress of time with the completions of duty, that it may not surprise us when the heart is unfurnished with the principles which should mark its maturity, or while objects are left unattained, which should form the

possession of our spirits in each successive portion of existence.

But the notion that death is the extinction of our being is upheld by few ; and these few have the refutation of their opinion in their own consciences. Proceeding, therefore, a step further, we come to consider death, not as the negation—not as the mere contrary of life, but as a change in the manner of existing. The animal functions of the body, the breathing, the movement of the limbs, have evidently nothing to do with the essential action of the mind : thought, though affected by them, is not dependent on them. In rest, in action, in ease, and in suffering, we recognize an independent power within us ; a power by which we move in a higher element than the atmosphere we breathe—an element by which the animal is kept alive, and consciousness quickened into unexplainable activity. As there are, therefore, two principles in human nature, the animal and the spiritual, that by which we live in common with other breathing things, and that by which we reason, and are raised above whatever else exists below, it is plain that these principles being separated, the man ceases to exist in the same state as before ; and that, since the body is necessary to the spirit's manifesting itself, the presence or existence of the spirit can be no longer known when rent asunder from the frame. But it will not at all follow, that because it is not visible by its ope-

rations on the body it has ceased to exist, for it was itself never visible; nor is there any reason for supposing that a mere separation from that with which it had nothing in common, should destroy its consciousness. When to this it is added, that it is found to exercise its power of thought, and all spiritual faculties, even to the moment of its separation from the body, there is the strongest reason for believing that, after it is set free from the corporeal system it still thinks, perceives, and acts. But the body falls to decay, and the soul becomes invisible, and is perfectly cut off from all apparent communication with the world in which it formerly existed; and this is death—death described according to the most obvious characteristics of our nature, and involving no difficulty not easily explainable on the plain laws of reason. With this view however of the subject, we have an increase of arguments on the necessity of a preparation for death. It being understood that the soul retains its consciousness, the same judge which it is to itself in this state, it must at least be in the next: and therefore, if there be a feeling of anxiety and fear in the mind when we sin and have left our duties unperformed, the same must there be in the soul when in a separate state it looks back with unavailing repentance on the past scenes of existence. It matters not what we think of a day of judgment; it matters not what we know either of that or of hell,

if we feel but that our spirits will exist in the future, we are then sure of misery, of deep, intense, permanent misery, if one tittle of human duty be left unfulfilled, if one evil principle be left in action, when the soul enters upon its final and unchanging condition. If a preparation for death, then, would be necessary were we to cease to be when we cease to breathe, incomparably more so is it when, instead of ceasing to exist at the hour of death, we are only cut off from the outward world; are only left naked, perhaps solitary spirits, doomed by even self-condemnation to lament, without end, their folly, and now never-to-be-removed corruption. For we know what recollection is; we know what conscience is: and these are the companions which the soul must ever have, and from whose suggestions it must receive its woe or satisfactions. Suppose, then, that we believe neither in God nor the devil, that we think of neither heaven nor hell, still we should be madmen, it appears, not to prepare for death; which, leaving us more entirely to ourselves, cutting us off from all sources of pleasure, or consolation, or entertainment but those which exist in our innermost hearts, ought at least to find us furnished with all those means of self-satisfaction and delight on which, through the endless future, we shall have to depend.

But we stop not here:—there is a God; himself a mighty, a universal spirit; and whence, seeing

that our souls must have had a beginning, whence could they spring but from him? Or is it probable they can ever become independent of him? Is it likely that he ever loses sight of them? Is it imaginable that when they leave the body they should escape him, that mighty Maker of spirits, with the breath of life? No! it is very plain that our souls, having been watched through their brief period of earthly trial by the Eternal Parent, will, on being separated from this fleshly covering, be drawn by the irresistible might of his will, through immeasurable intervening regions of light, direct before his throne. And this lays the foundation for another argument on the necessity of preparation for death; an argument in which lie centred appeals to all the hopes and fears, to all the generous aspirations, the solemn presentiments, the moral capacities of man's complicated being; an argument which we must deny God to reject, and which we must risk every possibility of happiness to oppose. For we now find that to prepare for death is necessary, not only to complete the object of our being, which the law of rational existence demands, or because our souls being immortal will be otherwise perpetually tormented by the never-blunted sting of conscience, but because we shall be presented as we die before the throne of the almighty Sovereign of the universe.

Still even this is not all, much as it is. There

is a vast system of mercy in operation to aid us in our preparation, and to give it efficacy; a system which, fitting itself to every principle in our being, leaves none at war with nature, with God, or heaven. But so long as we forget death, and the awful change it will produce in our condition, and live in the neglect of those precautions which are needed to prevent its finding us unprepared, we offer despite to that noble evidence of the Almighty's care for us, and are guilty of the monstrous sin and folly of seeing God working for us, and planning systems of grace to prepare us for death, and remaining utterly idle ourselves, utterly careless as to the issue of a business in which we alone are actually concerned. And if death should really find us unprepared, when so much is done by the Almighty to aid us in the matter, great, it will be allowed, must be the penalty we shall have to pay for so entering into the presence of God: there will not only be our sins to confront us, but the Saviour, whose blood we trampled under foot, and the Holy Spirit, who having long striven with our hearts, was at last obliged to leave them, by our dark determinations, to abide in iniquity.

This, I trust, will suffice to establish the principle, that we lie under many obligations to prepare for death. It is known that we cannot escape it; and it is plain, by what has been said, that in whatever way we contemplate it, the cer-

tainty of its approach, with the uncertainty of the exact hour of its coming, places us under the necessity of so living, of so numbering and measuring our days, that our career may not be terminated before our work, nor our souls summoned before the Almighty until they have grown up into the fulness of the stature of immortal spirits. Now there are two main objections to this truth in force among mankind, and by which they justify their delaying the preparation of which the duty and necessity are thus obvious. The one is, that it would interrupt the course of general thought and action; the other, that it is not necessary till a certain period or peculiar circumstances arrive. With regard to the former of these, it may fairly be allowed that, at first sight, there is something sufficiently specious in it to deceive the thoughtless, the ignorant, and the young. But the moment we look at it with the eye of reason, the shadow of truth with which it appeared invested vanishes. For, in the first place, death is so natural an occurrence, that if to think of it be to darken or make sluggish the course of thought, we must never think of ourselves, or of human nature at all; for we can scarcely step beyond the present without finding our reflections stretching into the region of this awful power: and who can imagine that a rational being ought to stop thinking when his mind finds itself on the completion of existence? Again, we know for cer-

tain that the loftiest, the most active minds are habitually employed in contemplating this very subject; and that we are indebted to their meditations thereon for some of the sublimest results of human thought; and not only this, but that wherever there is a pure conscience, wherever there is piety, there death is the subject of much and frequent observation; and that so far is this habitual recognition of its power over human nature from rendering the mind gloomy or austere, or unfitting it for the entire duties of life, that minds capable, through the aid of divine grace, of looking steadily on this supposed object of terror, are the most serenely cheerful, the most benign, the most self-possessed, and the most capable of fulfilling, at all times and under every circumstance, the great duties of social existence.

In respect to the next objection to the commencement of a preparation for death, it has not even the semblance of truth to support it, which might be alleged in favour of the former. For at what period but the present ought we to think of commencing a preparation for an event which may happen the next hour? And if we say, there is a natural reason for supposing death will not come without old age or disease, may it not be said in reply, that, with regard to the former, old age comes much quicker than is usually supposed; and with regard to the latter, that disease is guided

by such inexplicable laws, and makes its attacks so frequently where it was never expected, that he is little short of being grossly foolish who thinks his preparation may be deferred because he is not sick.

But, whatever be the number of years intervening between the present hour and that of our dissolution, the space that separates us from death vanishes at a single glance of the immortal soul; and we appear to stand face to face with the enemy. There is nothing in human life out of which we can form a screen against the scorpion eye of death. Our pleasures, our hopes, our pretensions of every kind crowded together, can scarce fill out an hour when death is recollected. The most important considerations, the greatest anxieties, passion and desire vanish before it; and leave the space over which we look a low and naked plain, which we seem to be hastening over with continually accelerated speed, and to the end of which we feel we may perchance arrive long before the night-fall. It is from this plain fact, that death is not only uncertain in its arrival, but that, at the longest calculation, it is not far distant, that we come to the important practical conclusion, that whatever preparation is needed to meet it safely and calmly, must be commenced without delay. In what this preparation should consist we have now to consider.

The terrors of death may be reduced to three main points: first, it is accompanied, in general, with extreme pain;—secondly, it separates the dearest friends and connexions;—thirdly, it carries the soul to be sentenced by an Almighty Judge, and devotes it to exist thenceforth in an unknown and inconceivable state of being. It is on account of one or other, or of all these things, that death is to be dreaded; and the great object of preparation is, first, to prevent the soul from sinking under the trial to which it will be exposed; and, secondly, to save it from the danger to which death leads after it has wrought its work upon the sinking frame.

To live in fear of death is a species of bondage from which every wise man would wish to free himself. It weakens resolution; it destroys tranquillity; it prevents the growth of hope; it mocks at happiness, and it abases thought. He who shakes at the idea of death, has no mastery over either his feelings or his determinations; and thus, the first step to be taken in the pursuit of wisdom, in the acquisition of virtuous habits, is to overcome the dread of death. And how is this to be done? Can the body learn to despise pain? Are the nerves to be deprived of their susceptibility of agony? Are the limbs, writhing with the anguish of acute suffering, to be told not to ache? No! we must leave death, with its pains and agonies, in possession of the body. The gospel does

not teach us to propound idle promises ; we must say nothing on this subject which we might have to contradict, when we come to try the value and the truth of it on the bed of final suffering. Then again, will, it not be hard to feel ourselves sinking from the fond embrace of friends and dear relations ? To know that the effort will be soon vain, to keep our eyes open to the watchful glance of love—to the tearful smiles that remind the heart of all past days and scenes of tenderness ? Will it not wring from the bosom all its strength, to bid farewell : to press the outstretched hand for the last time ; and with thoughts striving at composure, to contemplate those who are dearest to us left in the world, perhaps unfriended, but at all events unloved as by us ? What say you to these questions ? exclaims human nature—and human nature, in the exercise of its best attributes. Is not death an unbinding of the holiest ties ? Does it not separate the parent from the child, the child from its parent ? Are not the brightest, the purest hopes, blighted at its approach ? And is not the heart which has many affections, to look for its arrival as an evil to which no other can be compared, and which admits of no counteraction—no alleviation ? We wish not, as we said before, to give a varnished, or flattering view of the subject we are upon. Death is the blight of human affections : it does separate the dearest friends ; and the hour

of parting is more trying to the spirit of man than the season of direst suffering.

Then, in the next place, death conveys the soul into the presence of the Almighty Father of spirits, and consigns it to a new, to an untried, and undescribed state of being. This is a source of fear which every hour almost of human existence serves to augment; and when the last arrives, the soul has the whole sum of their evidence against it; the same witnesses, and the same evidence serving the double purpose of proving to it the certain existence and justice of God, and the terrible extent of its own sinfulness. Darkness becomes visible to the eye of death: futurity, with its vast heights and depths, grows into being before it: the despised calls of heaven; the covenant with the world and with hell, subscribed, but forgotten, presses upon the quickening apprehension. A doubt respecting eternity and judgment would be worth an empire now; but doubt never visits the soul conscious of its sin: confidence in the system which satisfied it in life is sought for, but reason and conscience mock the effort: the fine discourse respecting the tolerance of God—the exquisite arguments by which the neglect of Christ's own ordinances and commands were excused, are brought back to the memory, and by whom? Why, by Satan himself, who loves to see the dying man writhe with bitter sorrow at his discovered folly. But dragged by the strength

of death to the very brink of eternity; and becoming every moment more conscious that it will soon feel the eye of God—the awful eye of God, the light of heaven—in its terror bent upon it, the soul at last finds all its growing apprehensions realized; and before its dreadful plunge into the boundless ocean of futurity, owns to itself the justice of the divine proceedings. It is the possibility that such may be his fate that fills every human being with a deeper dread of death than that derived from any other consideration. The soul left to itself is full of this fear; and were it not for the distractions of the world, it would be constrained, by inward terror, either to seek its final fate at once, or to flee for refuge from its sufferings into the sanctuary of the gospel. But men, aided by Satan, continue to keep down the rising complaints of their souls: they cannot help their beginning the warning; they refuse to hear it out, and thus the inward voice of conscience,—that sense of the soul by which it holds communication with heaven—is habitually despised. With the slightest thought, however, of death, it regains the full sense of its responsibility, and becomes aware, as if by a distinct revelation, of the certainty of judgment, and of the circle within circle of manifold mysteries in which it will be involved.

Such are the causes of the terror of death. Causes great and appalling; and the force or extent of

which I do not pretend to lessen by any argument applied to the objects themselves. But, though we cannot strip death of its terrors, so far as he is himself concerned, we may be so prepared to meet him that he will be unable either to surprise or afflict our soul: we may furnish our heart with an armour, which, though it may not hinder our feeling the shock of his darts, will prevent their piercing it: we may so imbue our souls with the spirit of divine wisdom and righteousness, that they will have an answer and confutation for every suggestion which Satan makes; so that, while looking on futurity, they may look with steadfast hope, and while examining the working of thought, may recognize their immortality and their heavenly destiny.

The preparation which is to effect this great object must embrace these particulars. It must be a preparation of the mind, and a preparation of the heart: it must be carried on without intermission, watchfully, zealously, and with all honesty of purpose: it must be founded on a firm conviction of the value of the soul; must be continued through the perpetually renewed aids of a holy faith; and be rendered legitimate and efficacious by the application to it, in every part, of the merits of Jesus Christ. And first, if we would commence this preparation, we must examine the state of our minds. Are they occupied with many worldly thoughts

and wishes? We must get rid of these troublesome inmates, or at least subdue them, or we can never commence the holy and necessary work of preparation; nor can we free ourselves from their trammels, but by becoming more humble in our notions, and by trusting more to the good providence of God. Do we feel that we have little power of reflection—that our thoughts are not our own—that our principles are unsettled? Let us fall upon our knees incessantly, and obtain the grace of repentance; we shall then be in no want of employment for our minds. Let us seek for a clear and distinct knowledge of the system of divine grace—of the plan of redemption—of the workings of providence—and thoughts will arise as if a new fountain of light had been opened in our hearts. Let us supplicate God, till he give us a lively sanctifying faith—till he make the gospel clearer to us by the operation of his own Spirit; and we shall no longer feel that our principles are unsettled: we shall reason with firmness on the great questions of eternity; and the confidence thence derived will be the seed of still further confidence, and still enlarging hopes.

Then again for the heart. Within it are the issues of the passions; the elements of life in its mere physical capacities and yearnings. If we neglect it, these, its passions and desires, will every day increase in strength, and will at length so pos-

sess it, that neither reason nor Scripture will be able to rule its impulses. We shall thus become, what many are, the mere slaves of passion, or what is just the same thing, find ourselves unable to resist any, the slightest desire which enters our minds. But is it not at once evident, that while we are thus in bondage—while we have no command over our feelings—while we do good or ill as the suggestions of an ill-governed mind directs, we are in no condition for commencing the preparation which is so necessary to our safety? And what have we to do to remedy the evil? Again we say, let us appeal at once to God: confess to Him the true state of our dispositions, and in endeavouring to be honest and prudent before Him, we shall become better and better acquainted with ourselves. Grace will assuredly be given us, if we ask it with sincerity; and if we profit by that accorded to our early prayers, we shall receive it more abundantly in answer to supplications, in which we are aided by the grace itself. Sins which we now almost fear are unconquerable, will speedily manifest the strength of this divine assistance, by lessening their hold: habits which have tormented us from youth, and the evil and the burden of which we have felt, without being able to shake them off, will die for want of nourishment; and those wretched sophistries—those dark, crooked, sensual reasonings, by which we have been wont to justify our sins, will

be driven from the secret places of our hearts, and leave them to be cleansed by the light and air of heaven.

This is the preparation for death which reason and the gospel demand of us; and that we have no time to lose is evident from this, that if we live as long as we hope to live, and labour diligently all the time, we can scarcely then perform the task before the hour for ceasing to work arrives. Neither the mind nor the heart is easily cured of its evil dispositions; and divine grace is offered not to save us trouble—not to lessen the necessity of our exertion, but to stimulate us, in the first instance, and to comfort us in the next.

Let us now see what will be the effects of such a preparation as that I have described—that is, of a preparation carried on through the remainder of our lives, and embracing the particulars of repentance, sanctity of disposition, faith and devotion, produced by a careful employment of divine grace. The first effect of such a preparation for death will be, to render us happy in life; for while it will of necessity set us free from tormenting anxieties and passions—while it will occasion the sacrifice of habits which oppress and pervert the mind, and will thereby lead us into a healthier sphere of thought, it will also remove that dreadful weight from our minds—that shadow of the darkness of death—which is perpetually mixing itself with every vision of happiness that momentarily rises before our eyes.

But what can we say sufficiently strong to describe its effects when the hour of departure is arrived ? Let us revert to the particulars out of which the terror of death springs : they were great bodily suffering ; the affliction of parting with fond friends ; and the dread of meeting the Almighty Judge, and entering on an untried state of existence. And how does the preparation bear on the first of these particulars ? In this manner. Bodily suffering, it is universally allowed, is greatly augmented or diminished by the state of mind under which it is borne. So much is this the case, that a very slight disorder may be aggravated into a fatal disease by mental agitation ; and a disease fatal to the generality of men, be supported by the aid of a cheerful, serene spirit. What a vast difference, then, must there be in the sufferings of death, when borne by a Christian full of inward comfort, rejoicing in hope, long accustomed to be patient in tribulation, conscious of the presence of God, conscious of heavenly support ; and when borne by a man who has to struggle with agony of body and anguish of heart at the same time ; who has the awful dread upon his mind, that the cloud darkening around him will follow him beyond the gulf he has to pass ; that God—the merciful God—is not now to be appeased ; that a death-bed repentance is altogether a vain notion ; and that the evil power, to which he lived in subjection, is waiting

but the unloosing of the soul to claim it as his prey. The pain of dying must, in these opposite cases, be widely different: in the one the body will almost lose the sense of suffering in the deep excitation of a lofty hope, and in the all-subduing influence of a peaceful conscience. In the other, every nerve thrilling with anguish, will seem to enter the soul, and every thought that comes through the heart will come charged with a new agony. Let it not be imagined that this is an exaggerated contrast. We cannot exaggerate in such a case. On the bed of death the penitent, renewed believer, enters upon the enjoyment of the divine promises:—on the bed of death, the terrified, unprepared, because unrenewed sinner, feels the rivetting of the chains which hell has forged for his soul; and the regions of light and darkness are scarcely further apart, than is the state of the dying Christian from that of the dying unpardoned sinner. Reader! will you leave it uncertain in which condition you are to meet death? Shall it be for your fellow-Christians to look upon you with a feeling of awful doubt, as to what will be your state when the last hour arrives? Can you bear to have it a matter of much questioning, whether, if death should now come, you would not be hurled at once into the realms of interminable darkness? You have been accustomed, perhaps, to answer all inquiries of this nature in so light and

loose a way, that neither the questions nor the answers have seemed to contain any meaning : for if salvation is to be purchased at the rate at which many imagine it may, truly a man must be mad indeed to despair of gaining it : and if salvation demands the sacrifice of sin, the possession of divine grace, the renewal of the Spirit, the peace of God, and you are constrained to own you have not these heavenly gifts, what hope can there be that you are in the way of obtaining that highest of all gifts—that prize to be won by the soul in its full vigour,—by the soul which hath God to work with it,—by the soul that hath recovered its health and strength, through the long presence of the divine Sanctifier ?

But the difference between the mere suffering of death, when the soul is at peace, and when it has the load of unrepented sin to support, is not greater than the difference between its state as to the second particular I mentioned,—that is, in reference to its separation from beloved friends. Affection, as a part of our nature, is not less under the influence of the Holy Spirit than any other principle of our being. The grace which sanctifies thought sanctifies affection : the light which fills the soul with the knowledge of truth, throws its benignant rays through every winding of the heart. With this sanctification, affection receives the strength of an immortal principle. Love and sacred sympathy

become as undying as truth, and the conscious spring of life acts continually within them. When the last hour arrives, this principle, instead of being shaken by the invasion of death, grows stronger, and clings with increased tenacity to every fibre of the heart. Thus, from the mere influence of pure, sanctified feelings, the Christian is placed in the most advantageous of positions for bidding adieu to those whom he loves. He has an inward assurance—an argument of his own heart—which tells him he shall love and feel with the same intense-ness of affection when his soul is set free, as he does while his eye rests on the bending forms around him. But to this inward assurance he adds the knowledge, the plain and positive knowledge, which the gospel gives. He has learnt from the words of Christ himself, that he and all who have received justification through the atoning blood, will be received into everlasting mansions; that a common inheritance of joy will be shared among the redeemed; and that where there is a consciousness of peace, there may be an assurance of the re-unions and eternal enjoyments of love. The gloomiest circumstance of death thus wholly vanishes away. The believer, knowing himself to be immortal, knows that those around him are immortal also: life and light fill the whole space before him; and by the strong, the far-piercing vision of faith, he beholds the circles both of his

early and his latter home, again assembled in the everlasting dwellings of heaven.

It is not necessary that I should dwell in this place on the third particular. The first conquest of faith subdues the terrors with which the soul looks for judgment; and in its advance towards perfection, the feeling of sonship and adoption with God becomes so strong, that though the humility with which repentance endowed the soul remains the same, confidence in divine mercy, and assurance following hard upon it, leaves little room for fear; and the Almighty, ever apportioning his gifts of strength to our necessities, when death arrives, the Christian sees nothing in its aspect to shake either his confidence or his hopes.

CHAPTER II.

ON THE NATURE OF DEATH.

FROM the consideration of the necessity of preparation, we now turn to that of the event itself: and what theme can be more full of interest? Who can watch a ship making its way over the broad sea, and gradually vanishing from sight, without a thought respecting its destination? Who even can see a bird wing its flight, and not feel something like a wish to know its aim? Who, still more, can see what seems to be a star dart from its bright place in the heavens into night and vacancy, and not experience a trembling emotion of interest, as to what has been its fate? And what is the ship, perilous though be its course, with its chart and its compass, steering to known lands—what is the bird, guided by instinct through the vast, but to him, well-tracked air—what is the star, wondrous and questionable though its fate be, but a thing that hath no evident claim on human sympathy:—what are these to a human soul setting out

on the journey of eternity ; its last hold on the visible sphere giving way,—undefined space, for aught we know, to be henceforth its boundless dwelling, and its happiness or misery produced by the influence of causes and powers of which we can form no conception ? Simply looking to the subject as it regards mankind in general, it is one of deep interest : and no object that we can either see or picture has so strong a claim upon the energies of thought as a dying man. But what is the true state of the case ? The very being whom we may be contemplating, on the point of passing away into the mysterious regions of eternity, is perhaps bound to us by the cords of love—is a part of our very selves—whom we should look after with longing, tearful eyes, were we only about to be separated by a journey ; and of whose state and welfare we should think, during absence, with the most intense interest. In this instance, and whoever has a friend has the application in his own bosom, the consideration becomes one of near importance. But we go further. The state of the soul borne away by the force of death, over the strange realms of futurity, must be our own individual condition. We ourselves must feel the loosening of the silver cord, the trembling of the spirit hovering doubtfully between time and eternity—and then the ceaseless inflooding of light or darkness, and the mighty impulse hurrying us forward to undis-

vered lands. Thus viewed, the subject appeals alike to our reason, our affections, our hopes, and fears; and though it is one on which we must be especially careful not to let the mind wander with a vain curiosity, there is, no doubt, much comfort and encouragement to be derived from its calm and sober consideration.

First, then, what does reason, or natural knowledge teach us respecting the state of the soul after death? We have no means of discovering its condition when actually separated, but we have these two particulars on which to found our inquiry. We can form some judgment respecting its ruling qualities: we can observe it to the very instant of its departure; and some notion may thence be formed as to what will most probably be its state when no longer united to the outward frame. Neither thought, nor any of those faculties by which from things visible we form notions of things invisible—by which we group together the innumerable objects which appeal to our senses, and draw from the promiscuous multitude of beings thoughts distinct and palpable to the mind,—none of those subtle powers which busy themselves when the body is most at rest, by which conscience controuls to its purpose the workings of memory, by which memory itself acts, and hope is seen weaving her tissue of imaginary or expected delights,—none of these can be ascribed to any of the bodily func-

tions: and the portion of our being, therefore, on the powers of which they are dependent, will in all probability be unaffected as to their operation. We find that when once the mind hath imbibed certain ideas, or gained firm possession of any particular kind of knowledge, it not only retains those ideas, and the knowledge so acquired, but has the ability, without any further help, of making out of them, as a workman with his materials, new and ever changing combinations. It is from this very independence of the spirit of man that knowledge becomes so precious a thing—that the activity of reason is so valuable—that the wise and good are superior to the rest of mankind in all the means of happiness, and that genius defies circumstance, and obtains its object, whatever the opposition to its designs. For if the mind were not independent of the body—if it were a part of it, or resulted from any of its functions, a little sickness would not merely lessen its activity, but would positively derange it: the noblest talent would be subject to the changes of the weather: the man who astonished the world by the triumphs of his intellect, would have only a capricious, uncertain, occasional power; and the knowledge and study of truth by which the heart is kept peaceful and steady, would be hourly diminished by the mere accidents of bodily feeling. But we see daily that the contrary of all this is the case. We find that

when men once become good and great they remain so, whatever may happen to their animal frame ; and that though an acute disease may sometimes prevent the mind from operating, because of its very intimate connexion with the body, yet that the body may itself decay, and suffer great violence, without stopping the mind from pursuing its ordinary operations. We have thus the strongest of probabilities, that the spirit of man is distinct in its faculties from the body ; and that, though from the nature of its union with it, it must bear its sufferings, it cannot be affected by them beyond the period of their immediate connexion. Suppose, then, the body in which it resides is destroyed, what effect will this have upon its condition ? Apparently no other than that of separating it from the system of organs through which and by which it performed its work among visible things ; certainly not that of injuring its own powers, any more than you would injure a painter's knowledge of painting by taking away his colours, or a musician's acquaintance with music by removing his instrument. The painter and the musician, though their operations were stopped, would themselves be unharmed : and thus we may reasonably conclude it is with the soul when separated from the body :—its instruments are gone, its work, so far as visible things are concerned, is stopped, but in itself it remains the same as before its separation.

Then, in the second place, we can observe the state and operations of this independent spirit to the very moment of its departure from the body. The bed of death is not a resting-place for the mind; unwonted activity of thought very frequently characterises approaching dissolution; all the faculties are in full play; memory unrolls, with more than usual care, the long folded up record of life, and reason weighs, with seemingly new acquired skill, the good and evil which had till now been mingled confusedly together. Is it natural to suppose that this would be the case were the soul on the point of vanishing into air? Is it to be imagined that it would be the case were it about to sink into lethargy and forgetfulness? Is it not far more rational to believe that the spirit, which has in so many ways asserted its independence, and which now so clearly proves its energy and undiminished strength, will remain in the full possession of its powers, and with the capability of exercising them, whatever may be the fate of the body which it has left? It was on the evident distinctness of the spirit from the mere animal frame; on the powers which it was hourly manifesting; on the capability which it was seen to possess, even to the last, of performing all the functions proper to a free, undying, ever active spirit,—that the wisest of the ancient heathens founded their notion of the immortality of the soul; a notion which many of

them held with an earnestness approaching to the earnestness of faith, and which now appears in their works as the first, faint but beautiful, token of the morning light, before the day really breaks.

Let us now see what intimations Scripture contains on this subject, and whether they confirm the inference to be drawn from the consideration of our nature. They assure us, then, in the most distinct terms, that we shall never die; but the question at present with us is, what will be the state of the soul immediately on its leaving the body. Two answers may be given to this inquiry; the one, that the soul will sleep, or remain unconscious, while separate from the body, till the day of resurrection, when it will be awakened and united to the renewed frame, and with that enter into paradise: the other, that it will not sink into sleep, but will retain all its activity, and pass the period intervening between death and the resurrection of the body in a state answering to that of happiness or misery, to which it will be finally adjudged. That the soul will pass into a state of slumber, there is only one argument which appears to me to have any great force, and that is, that death, in Scripture, is continually represented under the image of sleep. Thus, in the accounts given of the death of the celebrated men of old time, the common phrase is, that they slept with their fathers; the prophets employ it repeatedly:

the same mode of expression is used in the New Testament: Christ says of Lazarus, that he slept, and adds in direct terms, 'I go that I may awake him out of sleep.' In the account given of St. Stephen's martyrdom it is recorded, that while his enemies were stoning him he called with a loud voice, 'Lord Jesus, receive my spirit!' that then kneeling down, he added, 'Lord, lay not this sin to their charge,' and that having said this, 'he fell asleep.' St. Paul repeatedly employs the same terms: thus, in speaking of those who witnessed our Lord's ascension, he says that part remained, but that 'some were fallen asleep;' and in describing the resurrection he follows the expression of our Lord, and represents the dead as waking at the sound of the trumpet. The same remark applies to that consolatory passage in the first epistle to the Thessalonians, 'I would not have you be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him.' To this argument, drawn from the language of Scripture, it may be added, that it involves no contradiction to the divine promises of glory; for sleep is a state of perfect repose, and the time expended in such a condition seems but the passing of an hour; so that supposing the soul should sleep till the day of resurrection, it would have nothing

to complain of; and its entering into happiness would be not less glorious than it would have been had it remained conscious all the intervening period. Again: it may be reasonably questioned whether, as man is essentially, by the very plan and character of his nature, a compound of soul and body, he could properly enjoy a conscious existence when these two essentials of his being are widely separated. Though the soul is superior to, and in its nature distinct from the body, it may be doubted whether, without the body, and though it can repeat at will the ideas it has already obtained, it could acquire any new ones,—whether it would not, in the course of an age, exhaust its own unaided resources, and thereby be reduced, before the intervening period was at an end, to a state of torpor, or of restless, anxious expectance.

We will now look at the other side of the question, and see what Scripture light we possess to lead us to believe that the soul will retain its activity, and not fall into a state of slumber. And first, an answer may be given to the argument derived from the description of death as a sleep, in this manner:—Things are frequently described in Scripture according to their outward effects, and as they present themselves to the eye of general observation. Now, when death is contemplated in this manner, certainly no expression can so fitly describe it as that employed by the Holy Spirit in the divine

Word; for death has all the signs of sleep—its stillness, its motionless repose, its forgetfulness of outward things: and supposing the expression we are considering to have been only used by Christ, and the inspired writers, in reference to these its outward effects and appearances, the ‘falling asleep’ would only mean that they to whom it was applied had ceased from labour, had entered into rest; and would not in any way apply to the soul, which, leaving the body extended in its deep silence and tranquillity, might wing its invisible flight to its destined home. That it could not multiply its ideas without receiving them through the organs of the body is but a supposition, and may be met with others equally specious and feasible. To come, therefore, to what Scripture says, we find that, though but dimly and obscurely, it does hint at the conscious existence of departed souls in a separate state. In the remarkable and, especially in respect to this subject, deeply interesting account given of Saul’s application to the witch of Endor, it is related, that the king having desired the woman to bring up whom he would, she asked him, ‘Whom shall I bring up unto thee? and he said, Bring me up Samuel. And when (to continue the narrative) the woman saw Samuel, she cried with a loud voice: and the woman spake to Saul, saying, Why hast thou deceived me, for thou art Saul. And the king said unto her Be not afraid: for

what sawest thou? And the woman said unto Saul, I saw gods ascending out of the earth. And he said unto her, What form is he of? And she said, An old man cometh up; and he is covered with a mantle. And Saul perceived that it was Samuel, and he stooped with his face to the ground, and bowed himself. And Samuel said to Saul, Why hast thou disquieted me, to bring me up? And Saul answered, I am sore distressed. Then said Samuel, Wherefore dost thou ask of me? And he then delivers that awful prophecy which struck the king of Israel with dismay to the earth. Here is the plain and open return of a departed spirit to perform the part allotted it by divine Providence; and that it was not a mere vision accompanying the words, is evident from the circumstance that the disembodied prophet declared distinctly that he had been disquieted; and that this disquieting was from a state of wakeful consciousness, and not from the sleep of the soul, appears from the further consideration that it is not at all probable, if his spirit had been laid asleep to await through ages for the resurrection, God would have allowed it to be broken at the words of the witch. On turning to the gospel, we meet with another incident tending to the same conclusion. In the account given of the transfiguration, one of the mysterious incidents of that wonderful event is, that when the divine glory in-

vested the form of Christ, his face shining as the sun, and his vesture becoming white as the light, there talked with him two men, which were Moses and Elias; who appeared in glory, and spake of his decease which he should accomplish at Jerusalem! Whence did these venerable teachers of the law come, but from the great home of spirits? Another of the most remarkable points which demand attention, in the New Testament, is the parable which Christ himself delivered, respecting the rich man and Lazarus. We know that a parable is a narrative invented for the purpose of conveying some truth to the mind which could not be in any other way so forcibly or strikingly expressed; but it is evident that no wise or prudent teacher would run into the danger of conveying an erroneous notion with the truth he endeavours to implant, and we may, therefore, be very sure that our Lord, when delivering the parable in question, stated no circumstance that could give a false idea of our future condition. But the parable in question represents Lazarus as conveyed by angels, immediately after death, into a state of happiness, and the wealthy sinner as being buried, but immediately after as lifting up his eyes in hell, being in torments. It further represents them as conscious of every particular in their condition, as contemplating both the past and the future; and, one of them, at least, as reasoning with all the en-

ergy of a new-born but miserable spirit, on the terrible consequence of a life like his. Now it cannot but seem probable, in the highest degree, from this, that the state of the soul after death is so far from being one of sleep and lethargy, that it receives a large portion of the joy or suffering which will be its final inheritance; and that conscience, instead of being lulled as it would be did the soul of the wicked sleep, then redoubles its activity, and wounds with a sharper sting. Of a different nature, and yet more direct to the point, is the circumstance which took place when our Lord, hanging upon the cross, gave efficacy to the penitence of the dying malefactor. 'Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom,' was the sinner's last and earnest cry: and to this the answer was, 'Verily, I say unto thee, to-day shalt thou be with me in paradise.' Scarcely can it be supposed that our Lord would thus have spoken to the suffering man, had he known that while he himself was about to enter a state of perfect glory, he to whom he gave such a comforting promise, would have no other happiness but that of sinking into sleep and forgetfulness of his sorrows. Jesus was on the point of trampling upon death; and the triumph which the penitent gained through faith in him, and in the efficacy of his blood, was, it appears, to be a triumph as immediate, and in proportion to their different conditions, as complete as

his own. The undelayed reception of the soul into a state of happiness, indicated by Christ's expression of 'To-day thou shalt be with me in paradise,' is further shown by the manner in which Saint Paul speaks of the separation of the soul. 'We know,' says he, 2 Cor. v. 'that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God—a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. For in this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed upon with our house which is from heaven.' He says still more distinctly to the Philippians: 'To me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. But if I live in the flesh, this is the fruit of my labour; yet what I shall choose I wot not. For I am in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ; which is far better: nevertheless, to abide in the flesh, is more needful for you.' It is not at all to be supposed that these expressions would have been used by the apostle, had it been ordained that the human soul, before passing to its Saviour was to exist a long intervening period in unconsciousness; nor could he consistently have so yearned for death, had it not been that he knew it would immediately enlarge his vision of divine things, as well as free him from toil; or in other words, had he supposed that, instead of its giving him a greater share of delight in the knowledge of God, in the contemplation of his glory, in the

power of communing with his saints, it would lull his free, noble, active spirit into dull repose.

We now come to an incident which exceeds all those hitherto mentioned, both in mystery and awful dignity, and bearing with proportionable weight upon the object of our inquiry. I allude to the consequences of death upon our Lord himself. In the simple account of his burial and resurrection, it is only stated, that having been laid in the tomb of the rock, he rose the third day. We naturally ask, since death is the separation of the soul from the body, and Christ was in all things like unto us, sin only except, what became, or what was the state, of his soul in the interval between his death and resurrection? Saint Peter has enabled us, in some degree, to answer this question. The manner in which he speaks is, as it must needs be on such a subject, short and mysterious, but his statement opens to us a new view of the argument, and strongly confirms what has been already brought forward. 'Christ,' says he, 'hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit: by which also he went and preached unto the spirits in prison.'¹ We have nothing at present to do with the precise interpretation of Christ's preaching unto

¹ 1 Pet. iii.

the spirits which were in prison ; but no doubt can be entertained, after the explicit declaration of the apostle, that the soul of Christ, while his body lay in the tomb, retained its full consciousness, and was still intent on the sublime purpose for which, as the Son of God, he became incarnate. It is on this passage of Saint Peter, that the article of our creed is established, ' he descended into hell ;' the word hell, in old English, meaning simply the separate abode of departed spirits, as well as a place of torment ; and the former application of the term being the common one when the creed was translated, it was employed to give the meaning of the original word '*hades*,' which is never used to signify a place of punishment. Manifest, however, it is that the soul of Christ suffered not sleep to invade its energies, even for an hour. The spirit that had lingered in his bleeding body, till all was fulfilled, lost not its consciousness at the moment of triumph ; the vanquished powers of darkness were not left uncertain as to their defeat, by seeing the pure enlightened spirit which had vanquished them, rendered dark and insensible at the touch of death :—they beheld him wandering unharmed through the mysterious passages of a region midway between time and eternity ; they still heard his voice, still felt his power ; and the thousands of departed souls, who from before the flood, and downwards, had there

awaited his coming, now beheld him, a spirit like themselves, returned from the conflict long prophesied in heaven and in hell, and proclaiming his glory through their own dimly lighted habitation.

These are the more direct and positive arguments which Scripture affords us in favour of the opinion, that the soul passes the intermediate period between death and the resurrection in a quick and conscious state. I will add to these one or two considerations, drawn from the nature of its present condition. In the first place, then, with respect to those who have been brought to repentance through divine grace, they enjoy communion with God and their Saviour, and the constant tendency of their souls is upwards; and urged forward in their course of righteousness by the impulses of an ever-wakeful spirit, they yearn with few intermissions for a fuller and clearer vision of the heavenly kingdom. In all these aspirations they are encouraged by the word of God himself: he tells them that he is ever with them; that his Spirit shall lead them into all truth, enlighten and elevate them, till sin and darkness become strangers to their paths; and that thus renewed, death shall have no power over them. Now, there can be no good reason to imagine, that a soul which has once been admitted into communion with the heavenly Father, which has been allowed to rejoice in the evidence of his great mercy and wisdom, should be cut off from

that privilege, and at the moment when it is expecting a nearer view of divine mysteries, be weighed down with profound sleep. Moreover, the worst death which the spirit can suffer, the only torpor to which it is subject, are overcome when it is regenerated through the operation of the Holy Ghost. St. Paul says, in the sixth chapter of the Romans, 'If we be dead with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with him: knowing that Christ being raised from the dead dieth no more; death hath no more dominion over him. For in that he died, he died unto sin once; but in that he liveth, he liveth unto God. Likewise, reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord.' Again, in the epistle to the Ephesians: 'God who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, even when we were dead in sins hath quickened us together with Christ (by grace ye are saved) and hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus.' 'God hath delivered us,' he tells the Colossians, 'from the power of darkness, and translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son.' 'We are risen with Christ,' he again tells the same people; 'and having put off the old man,' that is, the body of sin against which the condemnation wholly lay, 'have put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge, after the image of him that created him.' St. John

says, in his first epistle, 'We know that we have passed from death unto life.' Now, all these expressions indicate that the great struggle with darkness is over when the soul becomes renewed; that it will henceforth have no interruption to its free and happy communion with heaven; and that it has only to put off the body to behold all its hopes and desires approaching confirmation.

Again: the life, the energy which the soul possesses in its regenerated state, are the same as those which belonged to it before the entrance of sin; and certainly in his pure, unfallen nature, it would have never been subjected to the endurance of a long unconscious torpor. Yet further, the life and activity of the regenerated soul are derived from the presence and power of the Holy Spirit: and what reason is there to suppose that this gracious Being having filled every channel of the soul with light, having purified it from every spot, and rendered it a spirit bright and strong, and clothed it in the ethereal armour of salvation, leading it from conquest to conquest, over legions of devils, till it at last beats down the monarch demon himself;—what reason is there to suppose, that having thus given it power and victory in the flesh, it should leave it, at the putting off of the mere earthly veil, to sink into a dark lethargic slumber?

Nor stop we here: the renewed and sanctified people of God are members of his everlasting

church, which consists not merely of present and visible worshippers, but of the saints of all ages: and little is it to be supposed, that they who have completed their course, who have fully proved the might of the heavenly Spirit, and the worth of the Redeemer's intercession; that they who form the most glorious portion of the universal church,—should be now passing the first ages of their glory in unconscious rest. In the same manner, the redeemed are members of that mystical body of which Christ is himself the head; for the church is his body, the fulness of him that filleth 'all in all.' And this is of itself almost sufficient to prove that no soul which hath been converted, and made partaker of the heavenly calling, can ever cease to be conscious; for how should any member of that body lose its quickening, which hath the fountain of eternal life to replenish it? Would Christ be fittingly clothed with glory on his throne in the heavens, did the living stream stop short, and leave the forms with which he has surrounded himself slumbering for want of its revivifying power? No! the life and energy which Christ derives from his eternal Father descend in never-ceasing currents to the humblest members of his body: the life, the inconceivable, essential life, which, finding the frame even of glorified humanity too narrow a vessel for its fulness, beams forth, and mingling with the celestial light around him, mantles

his form with all the splendour of deity ; that life, thus glorious in Christ, envelops the pardoned and renewed souls of his people, diffuses itself with inexhaustible plenteousness through all the issues of rational being, and keeps the whole kingdom of heaven,—both of saints still battling with Satan, and of saints that have gone to their reward,—in the full spring of activity and hope.

I have now stated the reasons which Scripture, and some collateral views of the subject, suggest for believing that the soul in its separate state remains awake and conscious, losing none of its activity, none of its powers, none of its susceptibilities. The observations I have made in respect to the righteous and happy, may be applied reversely with regard to those who die in their sins : for in the same manner that it is highly improbable a pure and holy spirit should be, even for a time, deprived of the joy of its triumph, so is it that one evil and corrupt should be allowed in slumber to forget its wickedness and its fate. I confess that, when I began to look at this subject, several startling considerations suggested themselves to me, both from the language of Scripture, in certain passages, and the view of the soul in such constant connexion with the body ; and I did not feel at all certain to what conclusion I should come. But I have found, in looking through the Bible, and in considering the relation of the soul to Christ, such

powerful reasons to believe that it never loses its consciousness, that I am no longer doubtful on the subject; and am convinced that we may with great safety feel assured, that when our spirits are set free they will know and perceive all the mighty effects to be looked for from that awful change.

A few years at most—perhaps a much shorter time—will make us and our cotemporaries members of the wide, invisible realm of disembodied spirits. We shall then see the gathered generations of the penitent and redeemed—we shall behold the glorious ‘company of the apostles,’ ‘the goodly fellowship of the prophets,’ ‘the noble army of martyrs,’ saints from the four quarters of the world, the patriarchs of the ancient east, the soldiers of the cross, that fell beneath the swords of the heathen, the bold heroic preachers of truth that, in later days, came forth and hurled down the old enthroned superstitions of papal Rome:—these will in this short time be revealed to us; and amid that sublime assembly, it may be, through the mercy of God, that we shall behold those with whom in heart we still hold communion—the dear friends of our youth and of our homes, who are even now awaiting, with trembling hope, our arrival in that kingdom of the redeemed.

Let the thought of this destined habitation of the spirits of men temper our minds with seriousness: let it strive with our sloth and our worldliness: let

it help to raise us above that gross and narrow sphere of mere present and sensual existence to which we have hitherto lived confined. Want of reflection is the great curse of weak, uncultivated minds. But while it in some instances only deprives the understanding of much high delight, in others it endangers salvation itself. We may, if we will, forget how, by the invisible operation of its laws, the kingdom of nature sends forth its voice of harmony, and its manifestations of power. We may forget to admire the day-replenishing sun, or the still luminous orbs that crown the night with beauty, the firmament of waters in the under-caves of the earth, or those which the blue veil of heaven keeps suspended in mid-air. We may forget these, and such like things, if we will—we shall only suffer from it the common penalty of thoughtlessness:—but if we forget that world of spirits to which we are journeying, we forget the necessity of repentance and sanctification; we shall lose sight of Christ; we shall live in contented slavery to the world; Satan will exercise an uncontradicted influence over us, and death will come upon us like an unexpected enemy.

CHAPTER III.

ON THE RESURRECTION OF THE BODY.

THE free and active spirit, by which we think and act, hath properties which have induced the reasoners of every age and country to allow that it must be immortal. On looking into ourselves—on finding conscience, memory, and thought in all its various modes, and wonderful methods of manifestation, working their several tasks independent of every thing without, we derive from the very constitution of our being, from our own simple individual consciousness, a proof which not the sophistry of hell itself can gainsay, that our souls shall defy the power of time, and never be holden by the grave, or fall under the hand of death. The life of the soul is an essential life. Its motions are demonstrations of life, and its activity never ceases. No figure, no image of mortality applies to the soul. Though darkness may come over it, it diminishes not its energies; and though time may change its habits of willing or deciding, it makes

no change in its state or constitution. But vast is the difference when we look at the body : weak, corruptible, and decaying ; destitute of power, except that which is given it ; motionless, till the mind sets it in motion ; unconscious, till the mind gives it consciousness : it partakes in all its habits and principles of the dull, gross matter, which forms the bulk of the unconscious earth. Time wears it like a blighting wind ; disease twists and tortures its internal machinery, till the fabric falls to ruin : a little wrong mingling of its fluids, a momentary pause in the pulses of its organs, reduces it to a state of torpor. Then comes death, and in a few days the brightest, the loveliest of forms—the countenance that won all hearts by its sweetness—the graceful, firm-set limbs, that the sculptor and the painter would employ their best skill to imitate, are covered with the heavy dews of corruption. The hours have to be numbered how long the wreck of humanity may be safely looked at by the human eye ; and those hours are few. Decay hastens its work darkly and fearfully. The nerves of the strongest shrink at beholding its progress, and the frame broken up and marred is hurried into the grave. There the forces of the earth operate around it : limb is let loose from limb ; the eye falls from its socket ; the shrivelled, or dissolving mass becomes broken into clods, and in a little time the clod drops into formless dust And

taking a handful of that dust, and flinging it up into the air, we shall see that the wind will scatter it like the common dust of the highway ; and then human reason may well ask, Is this the body of a man ? and how shall the bodies of men arise ? Let us consider the question ; first, by the light of reason, and then by that of the Gospel.

Why then does it appear hard to conceive that there shall be a resurrection of the body ? The difficulty rests in this. It is observed that life is utterly extinct when the soul leaves it ; and it is further seen, that when thus deprived of the principle of life, it speedily decays, and becomes mere dust. Supposing, however, that the inanimate frame remained entire, or that the dust into which it is resolved were not dispersed, there would be little difficulty in the notion that this frame, rendered inanimate for a time, might be restored to sensible existence ; and that the dust, though bearing no mark of distinction, might be again animated, and formed into a living, breathing body. But instead of the frame remaining entire after death, it is usually separated into its numerous parts, the greater portion of which are dispersed far and wide. The dust, moreover, instead of being collected into urns, and preserved as a sacred treasure, which only some accidental and temporal circumstance has deprived of its value, and which will, at the end of some period, recover all its for-

mer worth, is gradually intermingled with the myriad particles of other matter, is carried far and wide through the air, or perhaps wafted in different directions over the ocean. Here is the difficulty to be overcome; for how is it possible, the inquirer exclaims, that these widely separated portions of the body, these minute and scattered particles should be gathered together again, and re-fashioned into the same frame as that in which the soul abode perhaps centuries before? Great, however, as the difficulty seems, there are answers to it. And first, the power of God is so wonderfully exercised in the universe around us, that simple reason obliges us to conclude, that with omnipotent power and all-seeing wisdom nothing is impossible. There is a mystery in the air and in the water, and the hidden caverns of the earth conceal operations of the elements of which we know neither the nature nor the extent. The cloud attracts the cloud in the high regions of the atmosphere, and in the earth beneath us, each particle of matter attracts, by some secret principle, that which is like itself: and thus the veins of solid iron grow; thus the glittering gold is given; thus the pure, clear diamonds multiply. Now, seeing that the material world is thus full of mystery, and of mysteries in operation, the results of which we behold every day, why should we suppose that no secret inconceivable energy can operate in reuniting the

scattered portions of a human body? The loadstone attracts iron by some principle utterly unknown to us, and this principle has been given it by the great Author of the whole system. What difficulty is there in believing that he has endowed each particle of our bodies with a similar principle; so that though they may be separated, and kept apart by force, the moment that force is removed, they will reunite, and again constitute an organized and well-ordered frame?

But I have taken the extreme case here. It is not necessary for the support of the doctrine of the resurrection of the body, to suppose that the particular atoms of which it is now composed, must be all gathered together again. It is well known that the mass of matter which forms the bulk of the body is perpetually changing; and that, owing to the wearing away of our frames and the replenishing of their strength, sometimes by this species of food and sometimes by that, they are not composed one year of the same particles which compose them another. If, therefore, we are thus continually changing the materials of which the outer vesture of our being is compounded, and yet remain body and soul the same, is it not manifest, that though that particular mass of matter which the soul puts off when it leaves the world, should not be minutely re-collected, it would not, in any way affect the resurrection of the body? For if it

could be said that the body which shall arise is not the same body, because it is not composed of precisely the same portions of substance; then could it be said, that the bodies in which we now live are not the same bodies in which we lived in childhood; for since infancy our frames have undergone revolutions, that have left very little more than the mere elements of their parts the same.

We feel, however, convinced that though the mass may change, there must be some permanent principle of sameness; something in the essence and constitution of one individual's frame, which must for ever prevent that which pertains to him from becoming the property of another. And on this subject men of profound learning and exquisite sagacity have expended the choicest erudition, and the keenest invention. It is not at all necessary to the reader's improvement, that he should be led into such speculations; but I may state in one word that which seems the most probable of the suppositions made on the subject. It is evident as I have said, that we need not conceive it necessary to the resurrection of a body, that all the exact portions of matter which now form them should be re-collected: but, on the other hand, it is equally clear, that changing as our frames do, as to the matter of which they are composed, they remain peculiarly the same both in essence and

constitution; and putting these considerations together, we may come to the conclusion, that there is some one distinct, and not to be divided, portion of our bodily frames; some central atom, in which lies wrapped up the essence and rudiments of our bodies, and round which are successively collected those portions of earthly substances, the increase of which is our visible growth, but the laying aside of which neither injures, nor changes that true root and everlasting germ of the body. This is one of the numerous theories employed in the explanation of the mystery we are considering; and it is that with which my own ideas accord. It is the most obvious result of every view that can be taken of the subject; and while it contradicts no principle of reason—while it involves no inexplicable mystery, it leads the way to our forming some notion of the manner in which the body may moulder in the grave, and yet the soul reappear, after many thousands even of years, in the same frame to which it was originally attached by the Creator.

But though reason might thus conceive the possibility of the resurrection of the body, the doctrine is in truth a revelation of the Gospel. The acutest reasoners of old time never carried their ideas beyond the notion of the soul's immortality. No redemption for the body was thought of: and herein we have a singular, and most remarkable

distinction between the religion of the Son of God and the philosophy of human reasoners. With the latter, much as nature was talked about in their system, nature was unknown, and in reality unstudied. They reasoned with great beauty respecting the human mind ; and in proportion to the degrees of sublimity at which they aimed, they thought it necessary to debase the body, and represent it as only the prison of the soul. Christ, on the other hand, while showing the soul possessed of power and capacities, and destined for an inheritance infinitely grander than any conceived of by philosophers, gives to the other portion of our being its due share of honour, and teaches us that it shall be glorified with a glory proper to itself, as well as the soul with its own lustre and immortality.

Thus the first thing to be remarked in considering the resurrection of the body as a doctrine of the Gospel, is the honour which Christ puts upon it, as an essential portion of the creature man. Disproving the opinions of those, who regarded it as, on account of its corruptions, only fit for destruction, like a useless and polluted vessel, He assumed a human and fleshly frame, and in that bodily tabernacle wrought the mighty wonders by which the universe, both of body and spirit, was set free from the law of sin and death. By this union of his own divine nature with the human body, he shows its natural excellence, and its perfect harmony,

while pure, with the purest of spirits. By his sufferings He paid the penalty of its purification ; by his resurrection He manifested that the power which had hitherto kept the body subject to death and corruption, no longer retained its supreme control : that the weight was taken off which had prevented its obeying the motions of the free spirit, and that thenceforth it was to share with that higher portion of human nature in all the benefits which a redeemed and immortal being could enjoy. These conclusions spring direct from the atonement which He made. It was an atonement made *in* the body ; it was an atonement made *by* the body, as the instrument of suffering ; and this indicates that corruption had been introduced into the world through its means ; that it was not because it was the mere shell of the soul it became subject to death, but because of its being the channel of evil ; and that, therefore, when redeemed and regenerated, it would be restored to its original rank in the scale of created things.

Here then we see how the resurrection of the body became an essential portion of the gospel dispensation. The whole scheme of redemption is a system of restitutions. The soul is restored to its spiritual might ; the body recovers its freedom from corruption : there is to be a new heaven and a new earth, when the purifying fire shall have swept over the face of this trembling world ;

and the courts of the Lord's house shall be filled with saints returning like pilgrims to their rest. The mode in which the inspired writers of Scripture speak on the subject, shows the importance they attached to this doctrine. St. Paul in the fifteenth chapter of 1 Corinthians, unfolds at great length the grand arguments on which it is established; and his confutation of those who opposed it is so clear, that were it not a portion of the Gospel, the proudest reasoner would express his admiration of its excellence. To the question, 'How are the dead raised up, and with what body do they come?' he answers, 'That which thou sowest is not quickened except it die; and that which thou sowest, thou sowest not that body which shall be, but bare grain, it may chance of wheat, or of some other grain; but God giveth it a body, as it hath pleased Him, and to every seed its own body.' In this passage we find a strong confirmation of the view before given of the subject: the seed of the body which shall rise seeming to be that one undivided portion, round which the mass is collected, but to which it is not intrinsically united. But of the change which is to take place in the body at the resurrection, the apostle speaks not less distinctly. 'There are celestial bodies and bodies terrestrial: but the glory of the celestial is one, and the glory of the terrestrial is another. There is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon,

and another glory of the stars ; for one star differeth from another star in glory ; so also is the resurrection of the dead. It is sown in corruption, it is raised in incorruption : it is sown in dishonour, it is raised in glory : it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power : it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body.' From this it is manifest, that in the resurrection a mighty change will be wrought in the elements of our frames ; but that this change, though from corruption to incorruption, from dishonour to glory, from natural to spiritual, will be no greater analogically, than that which takes place in the seed, when after lying and corrupting in the earth, it makes its way into the bright air and claims our admiration, as a flower full of delight and beauty. And this change will be produced by the operation of a divine energy, direct upon that seed of the body, quickening it into life, and purifying it with the full stream of heavenly light ; even as if out of a thick, dark pebble were made, by the concentrated force of the sun, a pure, lucid, transparent crystal. In the first chapter of the epistle to the Ephesians, St. Paul states it as one of the objects chiefly to be looked for through the enlightenment of the understanding, that we may know 'the exceeding greatness of God's power to us-ward, who believe, according to the working of his mighty power, which He wrought in Christ when he raised him from the dead, and set him at

his own right hand in heavenly places.' In addressing the Philippians, he expresses it as his chief hope, that he may 'know Christ, and the power of his resurrection;' adding, that when the Saviour, whom we look for, comes, 'he shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things to himself!' And next, that this immortalizing and regenerating of the body from corruption unto glory, is the consequence of the sacrifice which Christ made of his own pure frame; of the death and sufferings which He underwent in the body, is declared in the plainest scriptural language. In that sublime prayer for his disciples, which He made just before his passion, and which is recorded in the seventeenth chapter of St. John, he says, 'For their sakes I sanctify myself, that they also might be sanctified through the truth:' and St. Paul in answerable expressions says, speaking of the determinations of Christ, 'By the which will we are sanctified through the offering of the body of Christ once for all:' and again, 'By one offering He hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified.' These passages occur in the eleventh of Hebrews. In the first chapter to the Colossians, the apostle says, 'For it pleased the Father that in him should all fulness dwell: and, having made peace through the blood of his cross, by him to reconcile all things unto him-

self: by him, whether they be things in earth, or things in heaven. And you, that were sometime alienated and enemies in your mind, by wicked works, yet now hath he reconciled, in the body of his flesh through death, to present you holy and unblameable, and unreprouable in his sight.' And, lastly, how this glorious influence of the sufferings of Christ on our bodies is derived, and through what means it works, is made apparent from those many passages of Scripture in which we are taught that the merits of Christ, and all the power, the energies, the influences that spring therefrom, are applied to the being of man through faith. It is by this he becomes unto us 'wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption:' it is through this 'we are crucified with him, and yet live.' It is from this the strength and wisdom, by which He vanquished the great author of evil, are made principles of our hearts; and it is through this, Christ knowing his Father, and being seated eternally in his glory, we also know the Father in him, and in Him shall inherit an everlasting kingdom. It is thus that the whole system of grace and redemption, the manifold mysteries which compose it, the applications so numerous and complicated to which it tends, are all gathered up, as it were, and made plain both in themselves and in their application, through the all-comprehensive efficacy given to the righteousness of faith. Like the most per-

fect systems of the universe, the wonderful and innumerable particular laws and instances embraced in the Gospel, are seen continually tending to a few simple, and comprehensive principles. The human systems of the natural universe stop short, and after all the investigations of the sublimest geniuses, there are still remaining many separate principles, which though not, perhaps, contradicting each other, cannot be run together into the same power. But the light of the divine Spirit enables us to do this in studying the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven ; it carries us step by step up the Jacob's ladder of heavenly truth, and when we arrive at the last, each mystery—each principle which had at the beginning only presented itself to us apart, and in its own lustre and mode of application, becomes resolved, like the many elements of light into one grand, one all-comprehensive, one all-sufficient grace. Hence by faith we repent ; by faith our repentance is made efficacious ; by faith we are sanctified and justified ; by faith we destroy the power of sin ; by faith we break the bonds of the grave, and give glory and immortality, even to this weak and perishable body.

CHAPTER IV.

A VIEW OF CHRISTIAN DOCTRINE IN REFERENCE TO THE SUBJECT.

WE concluded the preceding chapter with an observation on the comprehensiveness of faith, as the foundation of Christian confidence. To unfold and establish the opinion thus stated is the design of the present division of the subject; and a simple exhibition of the evangelical system will, it is hoped, afford the reflecting mind an argument on the one side against fear, and on the other in favour of a calm, persevering obedience to the fundamental law of truth and charity.

And what is the Christian covenant—the New Testament which Christ sealed with his blood? What is this mighty mystery of godliness—this grand method of reconciliation—this wonder of wonders, by which all things are to be gathered together in one:—the tribes of the earth—the energies of nature—the unseen glories that lie beyond the veil of the universe—and the very angels in heaven? It is the pre-ordained, the pre-insti-

tuted system of grace, which, older than creation, was formed and established in the mind of the Eternal in the beginning. It is the system by which, as in a mould, the whole scheme of creation was fashioned ; to the development of which the course of things was with foreseeing wisdom most specially adapted, and in the perfection of which alone the purposes of God can be accomplished. The Gospel is regarded by the unthinking many as having had its beginning when Christ appeared upon earth ; but instead of this it was before all things : it was the first creation of eternal love—the first offspring of its decrees. It is supposed, again, to be concerned only in keeping men from the odious vices which degraded human nature in the old times ; or, at the most, in simply providing them with the means of obtaining the pardon of those sins ; but instead of this, it stretches in its designs far beyond simply satisfying the divine justice ; and inasmuch as it originated with the first decree of heavenly love, so is it also commensurate with its operations and intentions throughout the whole compass of existence : for there is no portion of creation, nor any thing, whether in earth or in heaven, or whether measured as to its duration by the circling of the sun, or the harmonies of heaven, which can fail of being included in that sublime sentence which says that God, “ hath made known the mystery of his will ac-

cording to his good pleasure, which He hath purposed in Himself; that in the dispensation of the fulness of times, He might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth, even in Him." Now the origin and scope of the evangelical system being thus sublime and extensive, in what was its foundation to be laid? through what means was it to be brought into action? and how was it to be connected with the beings for whom it was intended? We can know nothing of the gospel but in its connexion with Christ; and whenever the pre-existence and divinity of Christ are lost sight of, the whole becomes unintelligible and inexplicable: for the determination of God's love to create and redeem formed but one design, the act of redemption being only a second degree in the plan, and not, as is often falsely thought, a new design, conceived to make up for the failure of that which preceded it. And this design could only be established through the willing intervention of the Son of God; for had the Almighty pre-ordained the method of salvation, while the being who was to effect it by his working and his self-sacrifice was not in existence, he would have had to secure the sacrifice by a force upon the will, which would have destroyed its efficacy: whereas the everlasting Word was a partner in the very councils of creation, and rejoiced in the boundless love which

planned the universe, and set forth the method by which glory should, after the long circuit of its stream through many generations, pour back its resplendent beams into the sanctuary, carrying with them bright and purified souls to the very throne of the Almighty. Christ, therefore, was from the beginning the Mediator of the new covenant. When the worlds arose under his creative hand, He knew that He would have to cleanse them with the blood of the pure humanity with which He must one day clothe Himself; and when he arranged the laws of nature, and the principles by which men were to be governed, He left, in every particular, room for the impress of his own likeness; room for some prediction, some sign or type, by which the mystery of his intended sacrifice might be instantly, though dimly, discerned.

Thus pre-established by the counsels of the Almighty, the system of salvation made an essential part in whatever took place after the universe was called into being. No sooner had man fallen, than the means of restoration were unfolded, and the process of recovery then began. Under the gloomiest and the most unlikely circumstances, it continued to proceed; and when the world, overrun with horrible guilt, could only be cleansed by the waters of a deluge, this preservative of the system proclaimed its might in the grandest and most palpable manner: it saved the remnant in which

were deposited the seeds of countless generations : it saved the root of the human race ; and the tree again sprang up, and its branches again overshadowed the face of the earth. At length the period arrived for the manifestation of the Saviour : and He appeared with all the qualities necessary to his office as a Redeemer, and left not one tittle of either the requirements of the law, or the representations of prophecy, unfulfilled. But while completing the design, which depended upon his becoming a sacrifice for sin, He made known the application of the mystery to the purposes for which it was intended : his disciples were taught, first by Himself and then by his Holy Spirit, that whereas man was at the beginning placed under a system of laws, by obedience to which he was to be justified, he was now to obtain justification by the righteousness of faith, the essence of which faith is love, and its fountain the eternal Spirit of truth and holiness. And further, as under the old dispensation God had appended, by a special agreement or covenant, a continuance and perpetual increase of good to the fulfilment of his laws, so also did He through Christ, to the fulfilment of the evangelical law of faith ; and this covenant being then sealed by the blood of the Lamb, standeth for ever sure to the generations of the earth.

The extent and application of the system thus established, is luminously set forth in these words

of St. Peter: 'Grace and peace be multiplied unto you, through the knowledge of God, and of Jesus our Lord, according as his divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him that hath called us to glory and virtue. Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises; that by these we might be partakers of the divine nature.' (2 Peter i. 2—4.) Here, in the first place, we learn, that through the gospel all things are given that pertain to life and godliness. Life and godliness are joined together. The things that pertain to the one belong to the other also; and this both from their own nature and the nature of man. Life, in respect to its continuance, and to all those circumstances which render it a state of enjoyment, depended from the first on the conformity of the human will with the divine will. When they became opposed, human life lost its chief and most excellent properties. The genial heat which kept its current flowing, was withdrawn: the light which crowned the cup of happiness vanished: the energy—the spirit of existence had departed. And godliness being but the agreement of the human will with the divine, whatever pertained to its preservation, in man's original state, pertained also to the preservation of life, and to the increase of its means of good. The apostle, therefore, spoke according to the nature of things when he

alluded to them as receiving strength and increase from the same sources, and we may properly ask, therefore, what are the things which so intimately pertain to these twin sources of human existence and human glory? Life evidently, in the first instance, depends on the will of God, its fountain-head: whether it shall continue must depend on the same first cause: the determination of God might in an instant stop its current in all its various channels, and reduce the animated world to a heap of ashes, or a waste of breathless ruins. But the Almighty does not proceed thus: even in his judgments He has not stopped the sources of existence, but has rather destroyed those whom it quickened by the stroke of his arm, or the hot breath of his anger: nor has He more than once since the beginning of time, swept the united tribes of mankind, by a general judgment, from the earth. His anger against the iniquity with which human life has been poisoned, is shown chiefly in the natural consequences which spring from that infection, and the withdrawal of those qualities in human existence, which at first, and properly, made up the essence of life as the quickening element of man's soul and spirit. Sin is the contradiction of the will of God. This is easily comprehended and allowed: but there is a mysterious power in sin not so easily understood. Death was conceived with it in the bowels of hell; misery is

their constant companion, and fear their herald and prophet. Did these awful witnesses of the power of sin come into the broad day-light, and proclaim their doings ; were the spiritual world a thing for the natural eye to contemplate, and could we see the effects of sin in its different operations, not the boldest of hearts would dare to repeat its momentary glance : but the work of sin is invisible : its effects are not to be traced like those of disease or calamity ; it penetrates with a subtle venom the minutest channels of life, and the whole being becomes changed under its influence : but all this takes place in so secret a manner, that it is only by a peculiar enlightenment of the understanding we can be made sensible of the extent of its ravages. No invention of reason—no policy, however refined and wise, has the slightest effect on this mighty agent of human misery. It produces almost the same effects under every variety of circumstances : riches or poverty makes no difference in its nature ; and time and fashion, which change or subdue every thing else, leaves sin to work with undiminished vigour, after the same rule, and for the same purposes. The reason of this is, that it is the essential, the necessary nature of sin to corrupt—to produce all the opposite effects of the goodness and benevolence of God : so that wherever there is life, which is the gift of, and an emanation from, the Deity, but sin accompanying it, there it is contra-

dicted, opposed in all its proper energies, and converted into a bare state of being which has nothing of life in it, properly so called ; but, as mere existence, forms the basis on which sin plants itself, the substance through which it manifests itself, and becomes palpable. It is on this account that sin is ever represented in Scripture as inseparably conjoined with death ; for so it is, and that not merely in a figurative sense, not by the consideration of remote consequences—but in plain and perfect reality, and by the very nature of things. There is a disposition in careless, unspiritual readers of Scripture, to consider every expression which they cannot properly understand as metaphorical: vast mistakes on many essential points have resulted therefrom ; and this is especially the case in the subject we are considering. Every kind of interpretation has been tried to reconcile the divine declaration, that Adam should die on eating the forbidden fruit, with the actual fact. He did not die, it is obvious, say these blind critics of sacred mysteries ; but they have wholly forgotten in their theory the true nature of the life of man ; they have confounded it with the mere being, or breathing existence of an animal ; they have forgotten that human life is much more than this general animation ; that it had a different origin, is compounded of higher qualities, produces different results, and is under the influence of different

laws. God, when he denounced sin, and proclaimed death as its penalty, spoke in reference to the true and proper life of man as man, and not of the existence which he had in common with the mere brute creation; and in reference to this, his life as man, Adam did truly die, and after his pattern, whoever sins, or is under the dominion of sin, is as man in a state of death.

Now then we may perceive the great force of the Gospel as applied by faith. God, it is stated, hath given us, by his divine power, exercised through Christ, all things pertaining to life and godliness. Of these things it is plain, that the first must be a full pardon of the offences through which life has been forfeited, and this we know we have, or may have, through the redemption of Christ, and through that alone; but it is not simply life itself, it is all things pertaining to it, of which we are assured; and of these there are two kinds, the one enlarging and strengthening our hold of life; the other enriching it with a new capacity, and new means of enjoyment. Existing, as most men do, under the power of sin, they have scarcely an idea of what life really is. They have animation; their blood may flow briskly; their muscles may be firmly girt; each sense may be in a full state of activity; but with all this, there is a feeling in the heart that the life they possess is a plant without a root; a flame fed by a vapour; a

stream that hath no fountain of its own : they are never able for a moment to suppose that life is an intrinsical property of their frames, and they exist with the trembling consciousness, that a moment may utterly destroy the principle by which they move and breathe, and perform the functions of living beings. Now the grace of God operating on the human soul, the true seat of life, not only gives it a prospective expectation of immortality, but affords it the immediate enjoyment of life, of life that gives a new and intense activity to all the moral and intellectual faculties, which leaves no portion of our being in dull torpidity, allows no entrance to fear, and no intermingling of the shadow of death with its luminous desires and hopes. Then again the divine bounty encircles the life thus given and secured, with a vast succession of fitting delights and treasures. He endows the living soul with the wealth of the universe, by making each bright and beautiful object it contains, a type of the possessions it shall enjoy in its own proper realm, and sphere of existence : He interprets to it the language in which He has described his mighty mysteries of grace, and purposes of glory : He dignifies it with the title of an elected heir of heavenly principalities : His Spirit dwells in it with no uncertain demonstrations of favour ; but proving his presence by the effects of his purifying influence, gives it that gracious impulse by which it

cries Abba! Father! and rests in the conviction that it is sealed unto the day of redemption. Thus, looking at the words of St. Peter, we find them fulfilled even to the letter; for that God hath given us all things pertaining to life and godliness, appears in the first place from this, that He has accepted the sacrifice of Christ as the price of the remission of our sins, and has thereby removed the curse which brought death upon us: that He has bestowed on our souls a renewing grace, by which the dried-up fountains of life may be replenished; and that having thus restored to us the real principle of life, He has added to it innumerable gifts of grace, by which the re-animated spirit finds, in every exercise of its powers, some new enjoyment, and beholds, wherever it looks, whether around this visible universe—with its emblematical architecture, and typical manifestations of heavenly regions—or by the exercise of inward meditation on the glory embodied in the word of God,—wherever it looks, it beholds the indications of divine power exercised for the direct purpose of elevating it, and all beings of like nature, to a state of perfect and unvarying glory.

But the Apostle shows also, in distinct terms, to what end the gifts pertaining to life and godliness through Christ are bestowed. They are the foundation of great and precious promises, ‘whereby we are made partakers of the divine nature.’ It deserves

to be very seriously considered, that in Scripture the assurances of eternal life are always addressed to those who have received and profited by large supplies of heavenly grace. We constantly find, in looking through the New Testament, that titles impressive of a very near approach to God, of an intimate acquaintance with his will, of great sanctification and enlightenment, are applied to those of whom mention is made as the heirs of salvation. In the seventeenth chapter of St. John, Christ prays to his Father for the final salvation of his followers; but in doing this, He speaks of them as previously sanctified, through the full reception of his word. When St. Paul addresses the Ephesians on the subject of the heavenly promises, he speaks of them as chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world, that they should be holy, and without blame before Him in love, as 'raised, and made to sit together in heavenly places in Christ,' and as 'builded together, an habitation of God through the Spirit.' In speaking to the Philippians respecting himself, he represents his hopes of attaining unto the resurrection of the dead, as resting on his being 'found in Christ.' When addressing the Colossians 'on the hope laid up for them in heaven,' he prays that they may be 'filled with the knowledge of his will, in all wisdom, and spiritual understanding;' that they may 'walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing;' that they may 'be

strengthened with all might, according to his glorious power, unto all patience and long suffering with joyfulness;’ and, not to multiply quotations, in speaking to the Roman converts, he shows the dependence of every step in the scale of salvation, even from its first foundation in the everlasting counsels of God, to its perfection in glory, on the sanctification of the whole being. ‘Whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the first-born among many brethren. Moreover, whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified; and whom he justified, them he also glorified.’

We see from these expressions, and from the concurrent harmony of Scriptural language, that a very high degree of spirituality is required to make us heirs of the promises of God; that all the signs of a true conversion, of a spiritualized nature, of intimate communion with the Redeemer, must be found in our souls, if we would feel any assurance that the hope of Christians shall be fulfilled in our salvation. But why, it may be asked, is this high state of spirituality required to make us heirs of the divine promises? In the first place, without this spirituality, we can neither apprehend the value of the good to which they relate, nor acquire the properties of being essential to their enjoyment: and in the next, God demands it of us, because He offers

the full, rich treasures of his grace as the means of its supply—bestows every species of present good necessary to the attainment of the higher good in reserve, and making godliness with all its attributes the seed of glory to the human soul, plants that precious seed Himself by the manifold operations of the Holy Spirit.

But let us suppose that the benevolent will of the Almighty is obeyed : that his gifts are received in thankful hearts, and all the preparatory work of salvation duly performed : then there shall be consequent on this, a participation of the divine nature. This is the highest of spiritual mysteries ; but it is that to which all the doctrines and precepts of the gospel have a manifest tendency. Union with God, and the infusion of his own nature into the essence of our being, are indicated in the prime act of redemption. Who paid the penalty of our sins ? Christ ! And who was Christ ? The eternal Son of God ! And how did He pay the penalty ? By taking upon him the nature of man. And how is his sacrifice made applicable to us ? By our intimate—by our perfect union with Him—as the members of the body with the head—as the branches with the stem : by this—by the very act of our redemption, and its application, therefore, are we made partakers of the divine nature : then again, the same process is continued, and its results made certain and visible,

by the sanctification which immediately follows on the application of the grace of redemption. But how are we sanctified? By the power of the Holy Ghost! And who is the Holy Ghost? The eternal Spirit of God! And by what process does He sanctify us? By the cleansing of our souls from sin—by filling them with the light of truth—by blending Himself, the pure, eternal Spirit of holiness, with those our spirits, the true essence of our being. It is thus we are made partakers of the divine nature: by a method, it must be confessed, which the natural understanding can know little of, but not therefore the less certain, or the less manifest by the rule of spiritual reasoning.

Unhappily for mankind, the influence of sin upon the mind prevents them from beholding the operations of the system thus established for their salvation. Truth appears before them shorn of half her beauty, and has to stand soliciting like a mendicant, before she can obtain admittance to the heart. Sin, still further, tempts the mind to a positive distortion of the objects it surveys: it teaches the thoughts to transform themselves as they pass from the things without to the seat of reason within; and scarcely an object is beheld upon which it does not commence a calculation as to the degree in which it may be made serviceable to its own corrupt designs. Nature herself, in that wide domain of life and beauty over which she

reigns, is subjected to the selfishness of sin : the sweet order and interchange of her seasons are considered only as they bring round the hours of indulgence : the kindly sympathies and feelings out of which humanity should rise in the rich garments—in the bridal robes of universal charity—are kept wrapped up in that little corner of the heart, where the fiercest passions nestle ; and the grace which mantles through all the channels of existence, the wondrous demonstrations which every where brighten forth, of divine power and benignity, are all forgotten—or confounded together in obscurity—by the dull, gross eye of the sensual worldling. But if this cannot fail to prevent men's rising to any clear idea of the plans of God, even as to the order of things in this lower world ; if by this combination of their natural weakness on the one hand, and their corruption on the other, they are prevented from discerning the harmony which prevails in the present operations of the Almighty, and are led to view all things wretchedly confounded together, and almost wholly deprived of their essential loveliness, because they are perpetually investing them with the likeness of their own perverted hearts—if such be the case as to the things which are seen, what must be the case with respect to the things which are not seen ?—the things which it entirely belongs to the mind to contemplate—the system which the soul can

only observe in any one of its relations, when it rises superior to the fascinations of sin, and leaves behind it the broad, dense shadow of the world, and gets into the clear element of divine light? To the natural eye of man, the plan of the universe appears one uniform, unchanging system, which obeys certain fixed laws, and is kept up by a principle which there seems little reason to dread will ever fail. There is, in fact, no recognizing of any internal purpose involved in the working of the outward system—there is no thought of any plan formed and carried on by God, to which the existence of the earth, and the revolving of suns and stars is wholly subject; and hence the great bulk of mankind do really live in almost total unconsciousness of the working of that very plan on which their whole fate is dependent, and to which every object, and every movement of the visible world is made to be instrumental.

But in those ages of ignorance, when men believed that the glorious stars were but the watch-lights of their deserts, and that the round world stood immoveably fixed on its foundations, were the heavens less glorious in themselves than now? Did the magnificent system want any of the power and life which it was seen to possess after men discovered its true nature? Has the ignorance of our race, in fact, at any time been able to affect the works or operations of the Lord? Well, then,

look at the moral designs—at the spiritual decrees of God. The first glance which a sedate mind takes of the subject, must convince it that creation was not commenced without design, and that that design could not be limited to the giving of motion to a mere material system, or to the bestowing of a momentary life on beings who, during that brief career, would stand exposed to innumerable ills. To imagine that the Almighty created the universe with no other design than this, would be to view Him in the light of some proudly ingenious being, who set about and formed a complicated machine, without knowing any purpose to which it might be applied. It cannot, therefore, for an instant be doubted, but that the intentions of the Almighty in our creation extend very far beyond what is visible to us; and as little can it be doubted, but that whatever those intentions are, they will be fulfilled to the minutest particular. Here then we have the general principle on which St. Paul's declaration is founded: 'If we believe not, yet He abideth faithful: He cannot deny Himself:' that is, our ignorance, or disbelief, cannot affect the counsels of God. If we choose to live on in darkness, it cannot diminish the unclouded lustre of his glory: if we are resolved not to acknowledge his decrees, the steadfastness of those decrees will not be shaken thereby: and from the principle thus generally stated, we may

descend to the consideration of its bearings upon our own personal prospects.

And first let us view it in respect to the purpose of our existence. God has no more given the breath of life to a single individual without having an immediate good in view by so doing, than He has brought the universe into existence without design. Whoever breathes, his soul is numbered with a distinct mark in the great book of life: when he came forth into the world, the Almighty appointed him his task, and Christ, the benignant Mediator for our race, besought for him sanctifying grace and pardoning love. The eternal decrees are the law of his being: he walks the earth a subject of heaven: by the mysterious management of providence, he is never allowed to wander beyond that boundary in which his actions may increase the good of his existence, and contribute to the designs of his creation. That soul which animates his being—that strange tenant of clay—that spirit which hath its trial upon the earth, but its birth-place in the highest heavens—is as distinct from the mere outward system of things, as that system is from the power in which it began: and for the perfecting and the saving of that soul, there are special means appointed. Vast as is the number of the souls which Christ and the Holy Spirit have received in charge from the Father, not one is forgotten in their work—not

one passed over in the administration of his grace. Let us look around us then :—behold the multitudes among which we live ; see the populous city crowded with its thousands, perpetually busied in the affairs of life ; confused together as a mighty breathing mass, of which, the animating principle being expended, nought will soon remain but a heap of ashes. Let us look again, taking with us the light of the Gospel : each atom in that mass is inexpressibly precious in the sight of God : for each individual in that vast and thoughtless multitude, did Christ shed his blood. But do they know or acknowledge this ? Do they believe and confess that they are the beings for whom the system of grace offers such a variety of means of good ? The answer to these questions would form the ground of an objection to the Gospel itself, had we not ample proof that, notwithstanding the obstinate wickedness of the world, the designs of the Almighty will be fully established, and that, in every particular, according to the plan laid down at the beginning. It is the property of rational beings to resolve and act after a certain design :—every determination they form has an object ; whether one wisely sought, or rightly viewed, will depend upon their discretion ; but they labour to an end, and have at least a purpose in their intentions ; and how do we estimate the strength or capacity of any being, but by the success with which

it seeks the objects it is its nature to pursue? How do we estimate the wisdom of any plan or design, but by its effectual completion, and the results which follow? And in what manner do these questions bear upon the subject we are examining? In this way: Christianity is the design—the plan of God—the most perfect of beings; and nothing can be plainer than that, since all rational beings work to a particular end, and all their plans are the result of their several degrees of wisdom, and are completed according to their wisdom and their command over circumstances; most evident it is, that since this is the case, that plan which is in all its particulars of God's forming, must be sure of completion, and that in the fullest and most evident perfection. We have here the broad principle on which it is stated that the kingdom of God is not in word, but in power; for that which is in word only, is a weak and deceptive vision—a building up of thoughts without any foundation of practical truth; but that which is in power has a living fitness in its several parts, and a perpetual tendency to bring about plain and evident results, till it attains its completion by the production of important changes, or the creation of new means of good.

Now if we consider the kingdom of God, which is the Gospel dispensation, according to this statement, we shall find that, first, it was in power, not

in word, from the earliest period of its existence in the mind of its eternal Author; and secondly, that it is in power, not in word, that it has ever since continued to make its way through the world. The redemption of mankind was decreed like his creation by the inseparable wisdom and love of the Almighty Father. We may put a thousand questions as to why man was not created so as to prevent the possibility of his falling—or why it was that as God intended to restore him to good, he was not saved from ever losing it: but these are the questions of a curiosity which has blinded the eyes of the mind to the measurement of its proper capacity, and the legitimate objects of inquiry; for we might with equal propriety ask why God, when creating the world, did not give it a renewing principle of life and vegetation in itself; why He did not surround it with an atmosphere of light, instead of sending it to whirl through the wide track of space in which it receives, and then again loses, the nourishing beams of the sun: but it is manifest that no other reply could be given to such questions, except such as would compel us to confess our ignorance as to the primary reason on which creation is arranged. And this is the case with those which respect the mysteries of redemption and salvation; the first reasons of all things, the elements of the design—the counsels of life and being—the essence of all creative influences

and plans having their inscrutable beginning in the will of God, to fathom which man himself must have been a God.

Have we nothing then to do with the proceedings of the Almighty? Are we to be passive, uninquiring spectators of what is going on around us? Are we to be the subjects of laws and dispensations, and feel ourselves inspired with an unconquerable desire to examine them, but be told that we must, as a principle of duty and humility, subdue that desire, and close our eyes, lest we should strain them, and cease to inquire lest we should ask too much? No. We should not have these impulses to inquiry, if it were not good for us to inquire: but the proper aim of our questions is not how or why this thing is, but what it is? Not according to what primary rule this plan or dispensation was designed; but how it is carried on, and to what end it is tending: and giving all the energy to our thoughts on this line of inquiry that we can, every moment devoted to their exercise will demonstrate to us that the kingdom of God has ever had a productive progress; for we shall see that from the first proclamation of Christ's intended sacrifice, divine grace began to operate: that a succession of men, mighty in spirit, and in the strength of truth, were raised up, and had ever around them a firm, though little flock of devoted hearers: that a church was formed, in which were exhibited perpetual mani-

festations of the unchangeableness of God's promises; and that in the midst of the dire confusion into which the world had plunged itself; in the midst of all the storms and darkness which Satan summoned up to blind men against the ravages he was making, the designs which respected that church, were carried steadily forward, and never once failed so as to leave the world without clear, determined witnesses, to the truth and presence of the Almighty. Now had his kingdom, while the foundations of it were thus being laid, been a shadowy, theoretical kingdom, there would have been nothing of all this: fallen man would have looked up to heaven with a momentary gleam of hope in his eyes, when he heard the promise of a Redeemer; but viewing it only as a promise referring to the latter days, he would have sunk irrecoverably into apathy and despair. Had the promise been only repeated by the prophets who were raised up to publish it, they would have been heard with a passing interest and curiosity, but no permanent effect would have been produced; no mention would have been heard of the seven thousand that bowed not the knee to Baal; no church would have existed, and withstood the assaults of the spirits of evil and of darkness; all the thoughts and desires of men would have been resolved into the parent element of sin; and the seed which God had sown would have every where perished in the germ. But

his plans were in power, not in word : the wondrous strength of his own eternal Spirit, wrought out the particulars of the design which had been laid : the signs and traces of his might were never absent from the face of nature, or the deep heart of universal humanity. Like the sound of abundance of rain, which Elijah heard ere it fell—or that ‘sound of a going in the tops of the mulberry-trees ;’ when God was about to slay the Philistines, there was, as it were, a whispering through the whole system of things of the secret but irresistible operations of his presence. Nothing retarded, and nothing quickened or anticipated his counsels ; all went on, measured both as to extent and season, solely by his will ; and when the world arrived at each allotted and foremarked period of its existence, that portion precisely of the great plan was completed, which the measurement of its parts required. Power was manifested in the minutest particular of the work : the spirit of prophecy refrained not from tracing on the veil which concealed the future, even the small, thin lines, which prefigured circumstances of seeming unimportance even in present history ; but these circumstances, when centuries had passed away, all appeared in answer to that minute tracery, and the word of prophecy was converted into the most perfect demonstration of power. Satan, who might have been confined to his abyss, or deprived of his

strength, was allowed to try all his might for the overthrow of the design : he was shorn of none of his terrors ; was forbidden no spot of the wide world : surrounded by the ministers of his will, he might enter where he would ; might assail the wisest of men ; might inspire the thousands with lust and fury, and the few with pride and ambition. Did he require means to help him in his object ? they were not shut from him : the bowels of the earth were open, and he might dig out gold ; the kingdoms which had been established in blood, he might offer as prizes to those who would obey him. Did he fear that men would not commit murder, or be guilty of lying, or deny their God, or contend against his church without the offer of special rewards ? he might offer them rewards ; he might give them possessions ; he might clothe them in purple and fine linen ; he might give pride and folly a coach to ride in ; dress up falsehood with all the graces his wit could bestow ; and so manage the affairs of the world as not to leave a single passion without the chance and prospect of a speedy indulgence. But what did Satan with all the strength he possessed, and all the means and opportunities which were thus left him ? Was the kingdom of heaven retarded in its progress ? Was one stone of the living temple thrown down ? Was a single particular in prophecy left in obscurity, or unfulfilled ? Did

not all his efforts, unrestricted as they were, tend to the more evident and palpable completion of the plans which God had formed ?

Very manifest it is then, notwithstanding all appearances to the contrary, that the dispensation of the Gospel, in this its preparatory state, was in power, not in word ; and this its character it exhibited when actually published and established in the world, by the most conspicuous of signs. In the first place, how was it met in its earliest stages ? Did not the whole world appear armed against it ? Did not the people to whom, by way of privilege and honour, it was originally preached, reject it with determined enmity and scorn ? Did not the kings and nobles of every gentile nation and empire, oppose themselves to it with all their armed authorities of law, and all the inventions of the fiercest barbarism ? But was this all ? Were these the only antagonists it met with ? No ! there was Satan again—there were the roused up legions of hell—there was death—all of them in close league to overcome Christ, and silence the preachers of his Gospel, and stop the advancement of his kingdom. And did they succeed ? Look at the world now, and you have an answer : though not spiritualized, there is not a nation in this most civilized quarter of the globe, that dares say it is not subject to the laws of Christ. He has gone on conquering, even from the first trial made of his

strength in the wilderness: and instead of his doctrine having but the force of words; instead of his kingdom being but an idea, or a theory, the one is the mightiest engine that bath ever been at work on men's souls; and the other is the only dominion which mingled guilt and confusion have not shaken to its foundations.

On putting these different views of the subject together, we are driven to a conclusion of equal solemnity and importance. The world was against the plan and precepts of the Gospel; but the design of that Gospel, the efficacy of which is to be shown in purifying men's souls, shall stand sure and steadfast: evident, therefore, is it, that that which is rejected by the many, shall be accomplished in the few; and that while the glory of God is demonstrated by the offers of his love, and the accomplishment of his will in respect to these, the rest will demonstrate his hatred of sin, his truth and his justice in their ruin and despair.

CHAPTER V.

APPLICATIONS OF CHRISTIAN DOCTRINE.

WE are conscious of living in a state which is full of danger: the constitution of our bodies—every principle almost in the character of our minds—exposes us to the incursions of fear: nor does this notion of present danger alarm us without cause. The earthly frame for which we entertain so many apprehensions, is subject to a hundred species of agonizing disorders—the mind, which so often conjures up gloomy presages of ill, feels that it is really exposed to miseries, which should they come, would fill it with horror the most terrible. On surveying the circumstances in which we are placed, these inbred apprehensions of the mind find an awful stimulus to their activity; for there are few things around us which do not foretell change and decay. While yielding, as we must, to circumstances, and vainly striving, as we do, to act independently of outward things, we find ourselves perpetually either on the very point of suffering, or startled

by the actual sting of the scorpion, or bending with quivering lips under burdens which have grown upon us, we know not how. 'Man is born to trouble as the sparks fly upward:' and this sage sentence, which the gay and thoughtless suppose to be only written in the antiquated books of Solomon, is transcribed in letters, deep and legible, on every human heart: not always speaking of the same kind of sorrow, but by the very variety of its applications showing how manifold are the ills to which we are liable; for if I can tell my friend of one cause of uneasiness, and he can tell me of another, and so on through the whole line of my acquaintances, what does this prove, but that instead of there being only one or two main causes of grief to provide against, they are so many and so various, that the subtlest intellect may despair of even inventing ideal remedies for their cure? But has man set down to the patient endurance of ill? Has he remained passive while the dark tide is rolling inward upon him, and he must either perish, or scale the rugged cliffs which foam behind him? Has he seen the clouds drifting around the watch-star, and remained quiet till they overcast it, and left him to the blackness of night? Has he felt himself swept along by the whirlwind, and not made an effort to escape its impetuous current? Instead of his not doing this, his whole life, and the united powers of the

race, have been, from almost the beginning of time, employed to overcome the dangers to which nature and circumstance expose us. The bowels of the earth have been ransacked for remedies to pain; ingenuity is kept perpetually on the rack, to provide us with protection against the fury, or uncertainty of the elements; and reason and imagination have combined their efforts to fortify the mind against the pressure of anxiety. And in making these efforts with prudence, foresight, and diligence, is the intellect of man well and nobly employed: necessity prompts him to the task, and his faculties, obeying the summons, perform, like diligent servants, the required labour. But, suppose he neglected the precautions which are essential to his protection from the evils which threaten him; suppose that instead of being a sufferer, because, do as he will, he must always be vulnerable in some part, or principle of his nature, suppose he stood exposed, through his negligence to all the ills which are ever ready to come upon us; if he could continue to exist at all, he would be a living monument of misery; the blasts of winter would freeze up his blood; the darkness of night would sweep around him like a funeral pall; hunger, often left unappeased, would tear him like a savage and ravenous beast; and the first drop of blood that was tainted in his veins, would rapidly infect the whole current, and he would then lay himself

down to die, a wretched and loathed mass of grief. But what would his fellow-men say of him? why, that he merited his fate; for that there were the means of protection and comfort, and he would not employ them; that he might have been happy, but rejecting the opportunities of becoming so, lived and perished in misery. And who could find fault with such an answer? Who could excuse so voluntary, though so fatal an infatuation?

Now if we carefully consider this matter, and bring it practically home to our minds, we shall be in a fit condition for estimating the reasoning of the apostle, when meditating on the Gospel, he was prompted to put the question, 'How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation?' for on what principle can any one suppose, that if a certain rule of right conduct be clearly applicable in cases of inferior importance, it is not still more strongly so in those of a much higher kind? or, in other words, can any but the most wilful and corrupt of men deny, that if it be gross imprudence to neglect the means of present safety and present good, it must be at least equally so to treat with despite the opportunities of limitless and eternal good?

To trace the causes of things is the great privilege and delight of the highest order of minds; and to follow nature through the development of her most simple laws, is fraught with serene and

elevating enjoyment : still more exalted is the spirit of thought when it follows up the investigation of those laws, in order that by that steady exertion of reflection, and that patient traversing of the acknowledged paths of truth, it may catch a glimpse of the primal light—of the shechinah which rests in glory over the ark of God's great covenant with nature ; and the mercy-seat, which at his bidding the elements crown like cherubim with their intermingling powers. But what is all this exploring of the wonders of nature, compared with the deep contemplation of the mysteries of grace ? Or what is the little dropping of those sparks of light which fall from its fountain on the bosom of nature, compared with those well-springs of the glory which reward the Christian in his studies ? But the Gospel is given us as a lamp to our paths, and is not simply to be employed as a telescope, through which we may search for the wonders of the heavens ; it applies in every particular to the wants of the human soul, and wisdom teaches us to seek with the utmost care how so important a means of good may be brought into sure and present action.

The situation in which man finds himself as soon as he becomes properly conscious of his spiritual existence, is startling and awful. He discovers that he is standing in the midst of a system, the boundary of which on all sides is God. He sees a power mighty and mysterious in action,

which is not only sufficient to uphold the system, but to impregnate it with perpetual life ; and he feels that to that power he is naturally and necessarily subject ; that he can neither escape it, nor resist it, nor modify it ; but that, like a fragile vessel exposed on the wide ocean to the strength of its upheavings, and to the sweep of the winds, he must yield every moment to its irresistible influence. He discovers, in short, that he is in the hands of God : and that knowledge of his entire dependence on the Almighty—that revelation made to his conscience of his Creator, of his Sovereign and Judge, forms a new era in his existence, and has an effect upon his mind proportionable to the grandeur and importance of the discovery. But the fear of God (and fear is the accompaniment, the necessary and active attendant on the discovery) is the beginning of wisdom ; and the soul by which it is reached, has then commenced its course towards the attainment of the perfection proper to its nature. For the sublime objects by which it is surrounded, as they become more distinctly visible, become also better known ; and the soul, feeling its own weakness more deeply the more it sees of true grandeur, and its corruption with more affecting humility, the more it understands of divine goodness, it soon finds that it must either search out some means of escape, or perish as a miserable outcast ; there being nothing in the whole system—

nothing in all the manifold and diversified constitutions of heavenly wisdom, which can lead to the idea that man, by any exertion of energy, can escape his destiny—can shake off the bonds in which nature, circumstance, and God, the ruler of circumstance, the author of nature, the necessary predestinator of all things, have effectually bound him. What shall he do then? Torment himself no longer with a subject so far beyond the reach of human reason, is one of the answers of the world:—be satisfied with following the simple precepts of moral duty is another:—look at nature, and learn from her the perfect mercy and goodness of God, and have no more fears, is another: but whatever degree of truth there may be in these replies, they never did, and never can, satisfy any mind that has really awakened to spiritual reflection: they still the thoughts for a moment, but no longer: the dread which had been awakened comes back upon us with more force than ever; and we must either remain full of anxiety and terror, use some ruinous expedient to destroy the quick perceptions of the conscience, or embrace the Gospel. Now it is the last of these things, which every man who values his peace, who has any regard for his soul, will manifestly do; and to him whose ears are open to the call of reason on this subject, and to the voice of God summoning it to counsel with him, inexpressibly precious are these words of

Christ : ' He that believeth on the Son, hath everlasting life.'

But in proportion to the value of this statement, it is of the utmost consequence that we rightly determine what it is to believe on the Son. And in the first place, before ever any arguments have been brought forward to prove the peculiar nature of the belief alluded to, there is the strongest presumptive evidence to establish this point, in the simple consideration, that God would not place the conditions of man's reconciliation and eternal salvation on any slight grounds; and that, therefore, we may surely recognize in this belief, which is described as so all-important to the saving of the soul, a far higher, grander, more mysterious principle than it is ordinarily supposed to embrace. Why should belief justify us? Why should belief separate us from the mass of mankind, and put a crown of pure gold upon our heads? If it be nothing more than a simple assent of the mind to certain truths, then is it but an arbitrary appointment, by which salvation is appended to belief; and it is not to be imagined, that the all-wise Father of spirits would link the mystery of regeneration—the sublimely operative, satisfying principle of life and pardon, to what, outwardly considered, is often but the necessary result of mental activity.

And turning to the Scriptures we find, indeed, that this believing on the Son is not so easy and

naked a duty as the word, taken in its ordinary sense, would imply ; for, instead of its being used in the Gospel to express assent merely to the statements and claims of the Saviour, it implies the reception of the Saviour himself ; so that, while mankind interpret believing to be an acknowledgment of the existence and the truth of Christ, his own sanctified people only then say they believe, or have faith, when they have Christ dwelling in them—when they know him by the manifold effects of his grace upon their souls—when contemplating and adoring his perfections and his love, they receive from day to day new manifestations of his presence, and feel that the riches of his glory, and the majesty of his truth, are the firm basis on which stand the everlasting pillars of the kingdom of heaven. For what says Christ, after stating in direct terms, that ‘ he that believeth not is condemned, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God ’ ? He adds, as an exposition, as well as confirmation of this declaration, ‘ This is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil : ’ that is, they refused not simply to believe, but to receive Christ. And this explains why he did not, as some would have had him do, work more miracles than he did, and why he sometimes refused to work any, alleging, as in the case of

Capernaum, that he could not do many mighty works because of the unbelief of the people; for to force them into confessing him to be the Son of God, was not the point at which he laboured: had it been so, he could have at once produced prodigies, so many and so startling that none would have refused assent to his claims: but to be made a Saviour, a Redeemer, unto men, it was requisite that he should be received as well as acknowledged, and this he knew would not necessarily be the case, though he should be every where believed. This important consideration, I fear, has entered into the thoughts of but few; and yet the Gospel is full of circumstances and expressions to prove its propriety and value: Christ perpetually describes himself under the figure of something to be received, or as a living principle of the being. 'Whosoever,' says he at one time, 'drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water, springing up into everlasting life.' 'I am that bread of life,' says he, at another time. 'I am the living bread which came down from heaven: if any man eat of this bread, he shall live for ever; and the bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world.' In which we see established the great principle which gives life and efficacy to the communion of the Lord's supper; which is, in reality, a reception of Christ, and for that reason,

both a necessary act and a glorious consummation of Christian belief. Again, he describes himself as infusing light through belief, and the light can only shine where it is present. 'I am come a light into the world, that whosoever believeth on me should not abide in darkness:' while in that whole series of comforting exhortations which he addressed to his apostles just before his crucifixion, he declares, that the very result of their belief is a reception of him, which produces a full and complete union between them. 'I am the vine, ye are the branches,' is the burden of this heavenly discourse; and in that sublime summary of the whole, his prayer to his Father for those who had accepted him for their Saviour, he says, 'I have given unto them the words which thou gavest me, and they have received them, and have known surely that I came out from thee, and they have believed that thou didst send me:' and still further, 'The glory which thou gavest me, I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one: I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one.' The whole of which doctrine is forcibly alluded to by St. Paul, when, spiritually interpreting the words of the law, he exclaims, 'Say not in thine heart, who shall ascend into heaven, (that is, to bring Christ down from above,) or, who shall descend into the deep? (that is, to bring up Christ again from the dead) But

what saith it? The word is nigh thee, even in thy mouth, and in thy heart: that is, the word of faith, which we preach.'

Now, when we have found the belief of which the Gospel speaks as a justifying, renewing principle, to be the reception of Christ himself into the heart, no obstacle is left to our understanding completely why the Almighty Father has appended so vast a benefit to the possession of this grace; or how, and why it is, that 'he that believeth in the Son should have everlasting life;' for this belief is the very substance of heavenly grace; it is light and life, the living fire of divine love, the pure unction of wisdom; and he who has it is not only justified by it, as the legal condition on which the new covenant is sealed, but is sanctified and renewed by it, as the principle through and in which Christ and the Holy Spirit hold converse with the soul.

We cannot fail to conclude from these considerations, that Christians should at all times make Christ the object of their earnest meditation; that they should think of his actions, glorify his mercy, commit his precepts to their hearts, and open their souls to the influences of his Spirit. He is their Redeemer and their Lord; their great exemplar, the fountain of their wisdom and sanctification; their head, their source of life, their representative with the Father, their everlasting friend.

They can hope nothing, do nothing without him: there is no light, no happiness, where he is not. Their futurity is his undivided empire; their present life the odour of a sweet-smelling sacrifice to his praise. However modified by circumstances, however varied in the nature of its immediate ends, their course of action ends of necessity in Christ. However strongly impressed with individual peculiarities, the whole body of their feelings belongs to him; and however multifarious the relations which connect them with the world and its inhabitants, and though all are kept distinct and unbroken, in Christ they centre, and in Christ are rendered permanent.

But the power of the Gospel, and this union of a believing people with the Son of God, had their commencement in his sufferings. As a sufferer, therefore, we should have to contemplate him, were it but to prove our recollection of that great mystery of love. There is, however, an important practical reason why we should do this; for the maxim of the Holy Spirit is, that they who truly believe in Christ with a saving faith, are crucified with him. While, therefore, they ordinarily walk meditating on the power, the general example, the goodness, and grace of their Lord, they must sometimes come and stand around the mountain of sacrifice, or with more fervent devotion, perchance, sit down at the very foot of the cross, and looking

up, behold the Son of God, nailed and bleeding, his pure spirit struggling with the terrors it was necessary it should endure, his head bowed, betokening both agony and resignation, and his words, strange and mysterious for the Son of God to utter, telling the world that for its sake he was then enduring, not simply the rending of his body, and the complicated sufferings of death, but the inconceivable deep distress of being for that moment separated in his humanity from God—of being accounted accursed—of being punished as sin embodied—of being placed in the jaws of death, as the ripe fruit which hell had promised it—as the very substance in which the fire of God's wrath was to burn with the utmost intensity and fierceness. Yes, the Christian must thus come to the cross; and beholding his Saviour crucified, he will feel, if his heart be right, a more vehement desire to serve that crucified Saviour, to learn more and more of the mystery of redemption, to be made surer of partaking in its benefits, to cast sin of every kind further from him, and to appear altogether, in the sight of God, such a being as man should appear, for whom sin was crucified and expiated in Christ. And hereby we are led to make a direct and practical application of that highest spiritual doctrine: 'I am crucified with Christ;' which, in the first place, signifies, that they who acknowledge themselves saved through the atoning sufferings of Christ, do not

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simply consider those sufferings as having been undergone by their Lord, but do endeavour, by virtue of their faith and their spiritual union with him, to have his death represented in themselves, by the crucifixion of sin, by their putting off, as it is said in Scripture, the old man, and dying unto that power of evil which sprang from the world and their untempered passions. For as soon as the consideration of the death of Christ has produced any lively impression on the mind of a person, he feels himself constrained to acknowledge, that that sacrifice of the Son of God does demonstrate, in the very highest manner, first, the love and benevolence of the Almighty Father, and next, the frightful enormity of sin. And this feeling, or the conviction which constrains a person to acknowledge this truth, is the gate through which he can alone approach salvation : but as soon as he has made that step, the eye of his understanding grows clearer, contemplation quickens in his heart ; and thus becoming more convinced of the goodness of God and the baseness of sin, he strives with greater energy of spirit to destroy every principle of evil in his nature. And in doing this, the agony which Christ endured, to atone for sin, is constantly in his memory : he feels that it is not by his own strength he can succeed in the work ; and while he looks upon the Saviour as his example, he seeks, by constant communion with him, to acquire a portion

of that strength, whereby he triumphed : and as he learns to honour the Redeemer more and more, and to have a continually increasing sense of the value of his sacrifice, he becomes the more convinced, that the conflict which Christ endured with sin was the conflict of everlasting holiness ; that Christ, as the captain of the band, must have needs suffered first, but that those who would join him in the same conflict must also suffer, and suffer with him, till all in whom sin resides be either purified and crowned with their chief, or be consigned to darkness, as soldiers on the side of Satan. Through the whole period of this struggle against the influence of sin, while feeling its painfulness, trembling lest it should perpetuate its dominion, and meditating on all those representations of our Lord's sufferings, which, while they awe encourage, and while they humble strengthen, the faithful and persevering Christian is ever ready to exclaim, ' I am crucified with Christ ; ' I contend, in union with him, against sin ; I derive what strength I possess from him ; I could not make this struggle but for that ; and while on these accounts I share his cross, so do I also because, for the mercy he hath evinced, I cannot but feel a gratitude which leads me to lament, with the most lively sorrow, that he had ever so to suffer for me and for my race.

And does this confession of the true disciple of the Saviour lead to gloom or mysticism ? Let

us consider the consequence of dying with Christ. 'I am crucified with Christ' is followed by 'nevertheless I live; yet, not I, but Christ liveth in me.' The whole meaning of which, and of the doctrine of Scripture in general, rests upon the foundation, that sin is the ruin of human nature; and that the system of resistance proceeds from the original determination of the heart to retain its sinfulness. So evidently is this the case, that when at first a person is talked to about putting away those things, which in reality form the body of sin, he thinks that to do so would be to annihilate that which forms an essential part of his being and nature; and when you tell him, if he profess Christianity, that he must be crucified with Christ, he flies from you, either with a smile or an excuse, deeming, in his ignorance, that this would be to suffer something as bad as, or worse than death, and that he would thereby become deprived of the best power, and the best means, of enjoyment. But if it can be made evident, that he who is crucified with the Saviour only sacrifices that which really mars his being—that he only dies as a sinner, and not as a man—surely he who has any wisdom or respect for himself, will ardently desire that this spiritual crucifixion may at once take place, and free him, without delay, from such a clog upon his nature. And let us ask ourselves, what are those things which weigh down and disgrace

the pure spirit within us? What are the elements of which sin consists? What forms the body of the old man that is to be destroyed and put off? They are, desires which the God of nature, which our duty to our fellow-beings, which the essential constitutions of human society, absolutely and necessarily forbid our indulging, in the way in which the devil would tempt us to indulge them. They are sentiments which, when long harboured in the heart, deprive it of all its tenderness, all its ready sensibility and charity. They are the inspirations of selfishness, operating under a hundred different forms, and obedience to which shuts up each individual in the dark, cold fortress of his own heart, and would render the world, if obeyed by all, one vast sterile plain, in which the genial stream of life would be seen broken into a myriad little paltry brooks, all stagnant and frozen.

The Christian, dead in Christ, has bid adieu to the world; and the business of life performed with a constant reference to the good of man, never tempts him beyond the boundaries which heaven has marked out, and beyond which Christ would not have him go. The people of God have cast off the habits, the affections, the wild desires which bound them up with the corrupt mass of mankind, and made them the slaves of the same passions and impulses: they are no longer occupied in the pursuits of pride or ambition, and they are neither

met in the haunts of intoxicating pleasure, nor heard named when the world reads its muster-roll, and counts up those on whom it can reckon for carrying on its schemes : so that the words of the apostle are true in two senses ; for the Christian is dead, by dying with Christ, his sacrifice ; and he is dead, as being separated from the world by that change of inclination, which urges him to seek for happiness in another sphere of existence, and for wisdom from a source far hidden in the depths of eternity, but ever open to a soul like his.

But what is it which renders this death so different a thing to what the world supposes it to be ? Even this,—the life which appears sacrificed and lost, is hidden with Christ in God : a mystery, which conveys to the mind, when rightly prepared to receive it, unspeakable comfort and encouragement. For its plain signification is, that the Christian, resigning his spirit with all humility and faith to the will of the eternal Father, and in conjunction with the sacrifice made for its redemption, it is accepted with Christ ; whereby is fulfilled even in its present state, the prayer of the Saviour, that those who believe in him might become one with him, and be in him, as he is in the Father : and hence the believer, instead of losing his life by being crucified unto the world, does, in the truest sense, find it ; for whether we consider the nature of life itself, or the ends for which it was given, or

the objects best calculated in themselves to secure its permanence and increase its happiness, we find that in every respect we perpetually depend on our near approach to God, for all the glimpses of happiness, or good of any kind, which we may have succeeded in obtaining. Scarcely the boldest sensualist will venture to deny that there is no enjoyment like that conferred by a quiet mind, possessing full power over all its faculties, capable of finding delight in whatever is pure and lovely; untortured by fiery passions, yet alive to every kindly emotion; free from pride, yet nobly conscious of its dignity; self-subdued, mortified as to its wayward desires, yet rejoicing in a sense of freedom; unacquainted with the devices and artifices of the world, yet safe in the hour of peril; and refusing to partake of its pleasures, or to hold communion with its votaries in their hours of dissipation, yet filled at all times with the holiest sentiments that pure benevolence, and heavenly charity can inspire: the boldest sensualist will not dare to deny, that there is no delight equal to that which minds thus constituted enjoy: and how do they arrive at this state? An approach may be made to it by close attention to the acknowledged rules of wisdom and prudence, and by cultivating a certain gentleness of disposition and candour of mind, which may prevent the temptations of the world from falling with full force upon the senses; but

there is no certainty, no warrant, no signed and sealed covenant for the soul to depend upon in this case: a moment may undo the work of years, and the fine-spun web of arguments may be torn to shreds by a single appeal to the passions. The only infallible method for attaining this state, is that shown in the Gospel: the dying with Christ—the depositing of the life with God.

Nor need the natural understanding grow uneasy at the idea of this process: for who cannot perceive, that to die must indeed be a gain, when it is simply for the spirit to repose in him who is life itself? Who can avoid perceiving that no ill can happen to a being essentially spiritual, by becoming united to the Father of spirits? And what reason can there be to fear any loss of power, any diminution of self-consciousness, any confusion of the senses or the faculties, any change, in short, of any kind, for the worse, from being treasured up, even as his own only begotten Son was, in the bosom of the eternal Father? Or rather, what incalculable good must not flow therefrom into all the channels of human sense and intelligence? What wisdom, what dignity, what hope, what joy, must not necessarily belong to souls thus present and thus blessed with God? Hidden with Christ in him, they are counted as his riches: the brightest seraphim, whose golden wings can bear them through the glories of the highest heavens, are not more dear,

or more beautiful in his eyes, than those souls redeemed from sin, and hid in Christ. Still left to complete their course on earth, and to be as vessels of mercy diffusing light and knowledge wherever they are placed, he guards them with his ever-watchful eye : when they appear most humbled in the sight of men, he fixes on them some mark, visible only to himself and them, of a new claim to glory ; when they droop, gives them some fresh proof of his presence ; when they fear, makes the writing of the covenant of salvation more clear to their understanding ; and when impatient for the promised reward, satisfies them by displaying in a stronger light, the intentions of his mercy towards those who are not yet gathered into the fold. His children by adoption, he denies them no good thing which can tend to their preservation, or growth in wisdom, or increase in strength ; and while he thus dispenses his blessings about them, thus fosters them, and watches for their safety, they, acknowledging his mercy with profound thankfulness and delight, gradually grow into a full consciousness of their happy condition. Fear is cast out by love ; no doubt can live under the fervent beams of their assured hope ; the trials to which their faith is put, only gives it greater strength and consistency ; the high and solemn duties which the privileges they enjoy call upon them to perform, are fulfilled with cheerful earnestness and devotion ; and the afflic-

tions with which their patience is put to the proof, are met with humble prayer and calm resignation.

This is the happy state of the true Christian : nor let it be imagined that the description is overwrought, because we may not be yet able to discover its full truth ; or because there are so few that answer to it in the world. We are taught, by the very words in which the doctrine is conveyed, not to expect at present the manifestation of these sons of God : they are hidden from the eyes of the world as to their glory, though not as to their works ; and let us be assured that in proportion as we proceed in working out our own salvation, and seeking the renewing grace of God, we shall become experimentally convinced, that to be a Christian a man must be crucified with Christ ; and that to feel secure and happy, he must be hid with him in God.

Now, had we to stop here, we should yet have proved sufficiently well the vast advantages which accrue to the Christian, through his belief in the Saviour : for, ample reason should we have to rejoice, though we knew nothing more than that our souls shall be saved from eternal death ; that they shall be allowed to retain their consciousness, and enjoy for eternity not less happiness than they possess at present. But we have hitherto been considering only the foundation on which their felicity is to be raised : the happiness, the security, the dignity which they obtain on earth, is

but the earliest stage of their progress, the first small glimmering of glory : they must needs be happy, being united with their Saviour ; they cannot but possess much light and knowledge, living as they do in him : but what says Scripture ? they are to be accounted dead in comparison of what they shall be : they are hidden, and thus both in respect to their own sense of felicity, and to the manifestation of their glory to others, the day of their triumph is still to come. And when shall that day be ? Even that on which ' Christ, who is their life, shall appear, for then shall they also appear with him in glory.' This is the great result of all Christian doctrine ; this is the consummation of heavenly grace running through all its diverse channels. By this, revelation itself shall have a revelation ; the mysteries of doctrine shall resolve themselves into broad deep streams of light ; faith having the bodily, the substantial possession, as well as the spiritual apprehension of heavenly glory, shall have fulfilled its office as a justifying virtue, and shall thenceforth only have to look forward to those discoveries of ever-enlarging delight and beauty, which shall be made by the revealings of eternity. And the Almighty Father having completed the design of creation, having perfected that new family of angels, for whom his heavenly mansions have so long been prepared, will again pronounce his solemn, universal blessing ; and as

he did when the new-created world rose before him in its sinless purity, will look upon all things in that new creation of righteousness, and pronounce them good.

The power of the Gospel is at present hidden as to a vast majority of our race: its spiritual might is unknown to all but those who admit it into their souls, and foster it with corresponding desires and energy: the effects which it produces on these its true recipients, can be but very partially understood by the world, which while it only perceives but a small portion of the holiness which inspires them, can comprehend still less of the satisfaction which they experience in their hearts. Thus working wonders every day, it works them silently and secretly; and the kingdom of heaven increases as a bed of mighty waters might gather and increase beneath the surface of the earth, and remain hidden till they burst through the shell which covers them, and only leave behind evidences of their vast strength in the ruin of all that has opposed their rising. Secure in Christ, the believer looks forward to that completion of the system to which he owes his salvation, with feelings of indescribable joy; for what can the appearing with him in glory be, but the attainment of the highest perfection and felicity, which a spirit thirsting for immortal honours would seek to possess? What can the manifestation of the sons of God be, but a

spectacle, such as the imagination in its happiest moods would in vain attempt to depict ? And who would not feel content to pass through all the trials of faith, to live in poverty and obscurity, to bear afflictions heavy and frequent, to be, in short, crucified with Christ, and to die with him to the world, if he may but thereby make sure of becoming one of those glorified beings who shall appear in the train of the Lord, when he is seen coming from the innermost sanctuaries of light, to create the new heavens and the new earth that are to abide for ever ?

CHAPTER IV.

PERSONAL SANCTIFICATION.

CHRIST did not suffer to redeem men from the power of death, simply that they might recover life thereby, but that having recovered life, they might, in this new state of existence, live unto him, their Redeemer and Saviour. Christ came in the wisdom, as well as in the might of his Father's love; and it was not without the sure fore-knowledge of the glory which would follow his sufferings and mediation, that he yielded his life upon the cross. Man was lost by sin; lost in a twofold sense; he was lost unto himself, he was lost unto God; and the grand design of Christ was to recover that which was lost, and to recover it completely. The language which the Holy Spirit employs, bears directly on this mystery. Salvation begins in redemption; that is, in the purchase of what was forfeited; the blood by which the expia-

tion was made, is called the price of this redemption; and, according to this, it is distinctly said, 'Ye are not your own, for ye are bought with a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are Gods.' The principle on which this is founded is just and obvious. He who at a vast expense, and with extreme toil, recovers that which was inevitably and eternally lost, would in almost any case be allowed a right to the possession of what he has so recovered. But suppose there is no other claimant, he would then without doubt be considered master of the newly gained treasure. Man, however, it may be said, is a rational, free-willed creature, and is not to be disposed of without his consent: but if redemption placed him in the hands of the Redeemer as his possession, how could he be considered to have recovered his freedom? Would he not have cause to complain at not being left to do as he chose with his recovered liberty? To this we answer, that the whole of such reasoning is founded on a false supposition; for man, in fact, never was free, according to the sense in which freedom is here spoken of: he was always the subject, the servant of God; bound by the very law of creation to obey him with all the faculties of his being, and to walk in the path which his love and wisdom had marked out. When he violated this law, he certainly did not free himself from its obligations; for who ever

heard of a culprit's escaping from the necessity of obeying for the future the laws which he had once broken? Instead, therefore, of man being free either before or after the fall, he has always been under the law of God; and when he became a sinner, and sunk involved in the trammels of Satan, he became the servant of sin also—the bondsman of the devil—and thus had two powers to obey, which were as opposite as light and darkness in their demands. The misery of such a state may be easily conceived: it is the one in which all the fearful struggles of the soul have their origin; in which the terrors of conscience are born, and men grow frantic with despair. And in what light does redemption appear, when considered under this aspect? Suppose even that the service of God was a hard, disagreeable, and toilsome one; would it not have been an amazing benefit for us to have been bought off from a second servitude, that of Satan? Would it not certainly have restored us to comparative happiness to feel that we were free to serve that one master, instead of being perpetually dragged by the iron grasp of a tormentor, to do the will of another? But suppose that the law of God was, in every particular, a law intended to secure our happiness, a law adapted to improve and exalt our souls to the highest degree of glory of which they are susceptible; and that being delivered from the power of Satan, we were made free

both in nature and condition to obey that law, and obtain all the good it was instituted to confer, would not that be a true freedom? Would it not be the noblest, the most valuable to which a being like man could aspire? But this is the very freedom which Christ has purchased for his people: he has freed them from the power of sin and death, and brought them into the condition of the sons of God, having only the will of their holy and loving Father to obey in order to secure happiness and dignity. And who would wish to change a liberty of this kind, for that which the human heart in its sensual licentiousness, would describe as liberty? Who, reasoning rightly, would call that freedom which only left him to obey the worst of his passions in the worst way?

Baptism, that sign of sweet and mighty import, the sacrament of initiation and sanctification, washes the leper clean: the deepest engraven lines of sin cannot resist the cleansing force of those waters consecrated by prayer and faith, and the promises of God; and whether they be poured on the head of the helpless infant, yet guiltless of wilful sin, but polluted by that derived from Adam, or on the head of the aged offender, they ever prove their efficacy, and the truth of Christ's word. To him who cometh out of those waters, heaven is opened, and the Spirit of God descends with healing on his wings, to change and renovate his

soul ; and if he go not forth into the world a purified, holy being, it is his own fault, not heaven's ; the consequence of his persevering, determined love of his old, inborn sin, not the insufficiency of the means given for his recovery.

But baptism cannot leave us in the state in which we were before receiving it. Our condition in respect to God is necessarily altered by it ; for the vow and the obligation of a solemn covenant are thereby laid upon us ; and we are taken, by the very action of the Almighty's own divine promise, which is independent of our wills, from the condition in which Satan had supreme power over our souls, and are placed in direct communion with Christ, so as to be heirs of grace, whether we become or not inheritors of the final glory. And this is the first state of our existence in respect to the work of salvation ; and it is one which it requires careful thought, and much scriptural knowledge, to view aright ; for on the one side we are in danger of regarding it as a condition of rest and security, and, on the other, of not ascribing sufficient importance to the institution of Christ—to the influence which, as a sacrament, it must necessarily have had upon our being, seeing that it was given for the express purpose of bringing the fallen sinner within the range of God's redeeming love. Now, if we carefully consider the import of St. Paul's words, Colossians, iii. 1, we shall be guarded against both these

errors, for he speaks of a rising with Christ as necessary to our being prepared to seek those things which are above ; and by this it appears, that we may have been washed in the waters of baptism, have been placed in covenant with God, have learned the name of Christ, and the purport of his gospel, and yet not be risen with him ; all which plainly teaches us, that baptism does not place us in a state of security, or raise us above the sphere in which sin and death are allowed to have sway. There is, therefore, another step to be taken, a higher state to be aspired after ; and it is that described by the powerful and significant phrase of the apostle, the rising with Christ ; whereby we are to understand, that full and willing receiving of the grace of God, which allows it to operate on the soul with unresisted might, and so to quicken as well as renovate its powers—so to call into action all its high and noble principles, as well as subdue the spirit of evil, that it may be plainly seen not simply to have died unto sin, but also to have risen unto righteousness. A most solemn and important truth this, and one which it behoves us to consider with great attention ; for the general condition of Christians is not that which is indicated by these characteristics of a new being, in which there is so much of what is positive, but that which at best has only the negative quality of freedom from the grosser sins. So that the great mass of those who

belong to the outward and visible church of Christ, are, in fact, only in that second stage of the progress towards salvation; a state, it is true, abounding in privileges, rich in the means of grace, and full of promise, but one in which every thing has yet to be done which the soul itself has to do, by way of consenting to God's decrees in its favour, and adopting the plan by which Christ has offered to carry it to glory. And bearing this in mind, we shall find an explanation of many of those circumstances which at first sight appear almost unaccountable in the character and conduct of professing Christians. We hear them openly, and with every appearance of seriousness, declaring their belief in the Gospel: they attend the ordinances of the church, avoid committing offences against the more striking commands of the Almighty; and frequently use expressions indicative of thankfulness for his mercies, both temporal and spiritual. But we see them at the same time held in bondage by the love of the world: they pursue its pleasures, devote themselves to its business with the same eagerness as if they believed not in Christ, or in the existence of a heaven. Let fashion call them into the midst of the gay and sensual, they are there; let a care, or some supposed interest, put in its claim to attention at the same time as some ordinance of religion, and God, it is ever seen, stands no chance in their hearts with Mammon. And

how is this? Why they have been baptized [into the Christian covenant; they have received that grace which gives the knowledge of salvation; they are, by the promise attached to that initiatory sacrament, delivered from the captivity in which Satan held them, by his own legal right to the souls of sinners; and they, therefore, come under the denomination of those who having been baptized into Jesus Christ, were baptized into his death, answering to that word of the apostle in another place, ' Know ye not that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ, were baptized into his death. But this is a passive state of good, and they who remain in it, can look neither for advancement in holiness, nor for any clearer display of God's love, nor for any increase of hope, either as to its brightness, or its enlargement. Should they, therefore, be only able to keep in the position in which they are thus placed, it is one of little or no spiritual enjoyment: the signs of life are scarcely to be discerned; God's voice has no answer of joy in the soul; and the sun of heavenly love seems to pour its beams in vain on its chilled, inactive faculties. But usually it does not remain in this intermediate condition. The devil broods like a carrion-bird over the souls which have been buried with Christ, but have not risen with him. He watches every motion of the gross elements which envelop them; and as soon as he sees them

requickenings into sensual life, he drags them from the safe sanctuary in which they lay; he pours into every opened avenue of thought, the old poison which he prepared in the alembics of hell for Adam; and the spirit of man thus reanimated, comes forth from the grave in which it was buried with Christ, to perform wonders of iniquity, and defy the Spirit of him who redeemed it. Hence the horrible additions to sin, made by a people in covenant with God; hence the enormities committed by the professed followers of the Saviour: hence the little and slow increase apparent in the extent of the true spiritual church.

What is the object then to be sought after by those who care for their souls? The state of nature is one of complete degradation; the second state, or that in which we are placed by baptism, is one of negative, not positive holiness; and while the soul continues therein, it is passive and inactive, and makes no advances towards heaven, but is exposed to the return of the spirit of evil, which, in almost innumerable cases, succeeds in its designs, and finally renders its last condition worse, if possible, than its first. The third state, therefore, or that signified by the rising with Christ, is that to which the Christian who duly meditates on the value of salvation, is ever directing his attention. To attain to this resurrection unto a new life, he employs all the natural powers of his being,

and all the helps given him by God : it is the great end proposed, both directly and indirectly, in whatever he seeks, in whatever he says or does : nothing is of worth to him which cannot be made to contribute to the furtherance of this object, or which is not in some way combined with its enjoyment : and when he has thus profited by the means of grace, thus availed himself of all the privileges attached to the condition in which the mystery of redemption has placed him, then he rises from the death unto sin, and takes his position in the kingdom of Christ, as established on earth for the reception of such renewed and sanctified spirits, till they are fitted, by a succession of trials, and the accumulated gifts of divine grace, and whatever tends to the maturing of holiness, for the higher regions of celestial glory.

But what is the sign by which we are to know whether we have thus risen with Christ ? St. Paul gives an answer, which both satisfies us on this point, and affords us instruction as to our duty, if we have the happiness to have profited so well in our career. It is this, 'Seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth at the right hand of God : ' which as a test of our spiritual state, is of easy and immediate application. For do we seek those things which are above ? is the simple question to be put to our souls ? If we seek them, we must needs know, esteem, and love them ; and

this we cannot do, unless the Spirit of Christ live within us. But suppose we see sufficient reason to hope that we have attained this condition, then the test becomes converted into a precept; and having helped us to satisfy ourselves as to our state, it instructs us how to preserve and improve it. The great characteristic of worldly, unrenewed minds, is their low, earthly disposition: they are constantly occupied with some anxious desire respecting the present life: its cares are more than sufficient for their most active diligence: they are willing to pass morning, noon, and night, in the pursuit of the good which the world can give, and they rest contented when it is promised them. Spiritual-minded men, therefore, it may be at once seen, must be characterized by a temper the very reverse of that which delights in the world, or gives so undue an importance to its pursuits. Instead of allowing its cares to oppress them, and draw away their thoughts from God, they must feel a confidence in his providence, rejoicing sometimes in hope, and sometimes in resignation: and whereas the mere professing Christian has still to look for his recreation and pleasure in the world, they must have learned to find their greatest solace and refreshment in quiet communings with their God; in elevating, profitable conversation on the truths of his revelation, and in the performance of whatever may be pleasing in his sight.

But I feel that it is natural for many, and those even who are somewhat desirous of attaining this state, to say within themselves, this is all true; but are not such descriptions more applicable to those theoretical views which are taken in the closet, than to what a man can actually become in the world? Is it really the fact, that a frail human creature may rise superior to his passions, learn habitually to resist the sad influence of worldly care, and fashion his thoughts, his inclinations, his doings, according to a pure, sublime, and heavenly rule? Indeed he may, and must, if he would be saved: but in the most spiritual view of our duty, we have need of caution, of a calm, considerate temper. If we rush with the glow of enthusiasm upon the path of life, there are nine chances to one that the fire will be burnt out long before we reach the goal; and I learn from all that far-advanced Christians have said of their experience, that the quietest and most humble spirit is that which gathers as it goes forward the fullest and the brightest wreaths of light. Instead then of alarming ourselves, if we be assured of our penitence, and our desire to be saved, by thinking of the greatness of the work we have to perform, let us consider rather the greatness of the help which is offered us, and the untiring mercy of him on whom we depend. Let us satisfy ourselves, by deep sorrow for sin, that Christ has not died for us in

vain, and then leave to him and his Spirit the perfecting of our faith; the enlarging of our capacity for heavenly mysteries; the elevating of our thoughts to the higher regions of spiritual joy. Let us see that we believe, or that we are constantly praying for belief; and then let us not be cast down, though temptation should often assail us, and we should seem ready to fall; God will never be absent when we ask his aid. Let us study to love him more and more, by considering the demonstrations of his mercy, and then fear not, though we should not have that deep, fervent, unchanging sense of delight in his presence which we desire: he knows our weakness, but in that shall his strength be made perfect: he will establish on our will to know, to love, to serve him, a noble column of spiritual virtues that shall be ever increasing, ever connecting him nearer and nearer with heaven.

But Christian experience tells us, that the grace given at baptism is rarely treasured, and that he has to be a second time, as it were, baptized with the Spirit before he returns to God. He is first awakened to a sense of his spiritual being; he then accepts the conditions of the Gospel covenant, and becomes obedient to its rule; and if he persevere in his work, he is at last filled with all spiritual graces, receives the seal of adoption, and is confirmed in the hope of glory. Now, to begin

with the first of these stages, it is to be observed, that a person may be roused to reflection in a variety of ways ; that the reflections of one man beginning to think of God, may be of a different kind to those of another ; that all do not make the same progress, or pass through the same processes ; and that while one may exhibit, both to himself and others, all the signs of a great and important change, another may have commenced his journey towards heaven with an almost imperceptible, because more gradual change. But at all events, a man must have begun to think of God and eternity before he can be said to have begun the work of salvation. He must have had feelings in his soul, which either alarmed him, or softened him ; either forewarned him of approaching condemnation, or made him sensible of the goodness of God : for how, otherwise, could he be led to repentance, to prayer, to meditation, or to any other exercise, which constitutes the work of a Christian ? And that there must of necessity be manifestations of this kind in the converted soul, is evident, above all, from the consideration, that every, even the minutest particular, in the great work of saving and regenerating the human spirit, is the work of the Holy Ghost : he imparts the seeds of life, and the seeds of life cannot lie dormant ; if they be in the heart, they cannot but manifest themselves ; and when they manifest

themselves, how can it be but as the germinating fruit of holiness?

The Christian, in this his first estate, is weak, hesitating, full of doubts and fears; unable to determine on what step he shall next take; every moment inclined to question the motives which have induced him to think of eternity; and often weary with anxiety, and solicited by temptations, he dares scarcely look to the end which is promised in the perfecting of his faith. How weighty does the sacrifice of worldly amusement at first seem! how hard is it to change one's habits!—habits which have nothing guilty in themselves, perhaps, but which yet offer grievous hinderances to Christian piety: how vainly is it attempted to persuade friends and acquaintances to sympathise with the feelings which thus agitate the mind! how difficult, in short, is it to go forward at all with so many enticements, so many burdens, so many enemies to resist us! Strange as it may seem, therefore, it is then, when a man has just been made sensible that he has a soul, and that that soul is of inestimable worth to him, that he is most sensible of his weakness, most tremblingly alive to the dangers with which he is surrounded, and most susceptible not only to the warnings of his conscience and the calls of God, but to the fascinating voice of pleasure, the allurements of pride, the promises of Satan—to all things, in fact, by which the evil prin-

ciple, now more than ever to be struggled with, can operate with surer aim. And what is the consequence? Why the heart is humbled, the trust it had placed in its own strength and resources vanishes: instead of imagining, as it once did, that it could well and tranquilly perform the will of the Creator, it becomes convinced of the awful power of inbred sin, of the natural enmity of fallen man to God, and of the impossibility of reconciliation, except through the mighty and mysterious efficacy of redemption applied by faith. And in this very consciousness of weakness is strength; it is the wisdom of God which has revealed these things to man, and by the power of God his necessities shall be supplied. Fearful and anxious, the trembling soul seeks repose: it meditates on the past; employs the memory of the heart to try the value of vanished delights; lifts the dewy veil which years had dropped upon the garden of youth, and gathers the faded flowers to see if no wreath can be found again, at least to resemble, if not to equal, those of its happy spring-time. It finds that this cannot be, and the mind then seeks to discover in the present an equivalent for the past; but the search is equally unsatisfactory; and the whole course of life presents, to the awakening reason and the newly excited feelings, but a series of misplaced efforts, disappointments, vain regrets, and errors. The feelings which attend the disco-

very of truths like these, have a different force and character in different minds; but in all, where the knowledge of God has a beginning, there is a deep sense of the vanity of the world, of the insufficiency of its pleasures or possessions to give permanent satisfaction : and hence results a very important circumstance in the work of salvation : the mind, which has once been convinced of the instability of human good, has a strong argument against falling back upon the world ; and is consequently urged on to attempt an entirely new province in the search after happiness. Where grace is present, the choice of this province is well and earnestly made ; the soul seeks to adapt itself by various exercises to its changed prospects ; and its hopes, desires, and affections become imbued with the elements of a new nature. Every step it now takes, separates it more distinctly from the world, and consequently renders it more dependent on God. Though tempted, and still too earthly not to feel the force of temptations, it plainly confesses to itself, that should it yield, only disappointment and misery would follow. What shall it do then, but strive to complete what it has begun ? Should it throw off the yoke it has received, would it be free from the burden of an accusing conscience ? Should it say to God, I have thought to obey thy laws but cannot : I have tried to become holy, but find that the task is of too difficult a kind for my

strength, and then rush back into the world; plunge deeper than ever into the vortexes of pleasure or business; would it gain any advantage as to true liberty thereby? No: the freedom of a man's conscience, not absolutely willing to sacrifice himself to Satan, is worth nothing. There can be no pleasure in any indulgence which makes us every instant dread that the wrath of God may burst upon us; and, therefore, unless the idea and the fear of the Almighty could be really got rid of, the awakened soul could not by any possibility go back to the world, and find therein its former ease and satisfaction. If it be willing to be saved then, it longs to hasten forward, and it trembles at the peril in which its weakness keeps it: it knows how forlorn must be its lot, if unable to look for happiness in the world, it finds it not in God; and the strong desires for help which thence arise, mingling with its fears and its incipient sense of holiness, and its new hopes and yearning love towards the Redeemer, draw it irresistibly to the Father's throne, where it receives the same answer as St. Paul: 'My strength is made perfect in weakness; my grace is sufficient for thee.'

But it is not simply at the commencement of his course, that the Christian requires this answer to his supplications. Let us suppose he has truly accepted the Gospel, has faithfully acknowledged

himself a disciple of Jesus Christ, and is fairly on the path of life; is the trial then at an end? Has he no longer any strife or labour to endure? May he set himself down, and enjoy, like a traveller arrived at his place of rest, the balmy airs of heaven? No! he has still much to do, and that in the face of a watchful enemy, and with many things to tempt him to leave it undone. The people of Christ form a living temple, holy unto the Lord; and every stone of the temple must be polished, and made fit for its place in the glorious edifice. He who has been chosen must, according to the declaration of the Spirit, be made conformable to the image of Christ: for, says St. Paul in the eighth chapter of the epistle to the Romans, 'Whom God did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the first born among many brethren. Moreover, whom he did predestinate, them he also called; and whom he called, them he also justified; and whom he justified, them he also glorified.' A Christian then, when he has made himself master of the principles of his faith, when he has received the first fruits of the Spirit, and having accepted God's gracious offer of salvation, is in firm covenant with him, through Christ, will look forward to the increase of that holiness which is to secure him eternal life and glory: for what is he become through his reception of the

Gospel? A regenerated being—a child of God—an heir of heaven! It is proved to him, on the solemn word of the Almighty Father, that he has been predestinated to be conformed to the image of Christ, and if he be in any degree aware of the dignity of his calling, he will not be content with a condition inferior to that to which this decree has raised him. The privileges which he may enjoy, are many and precious; he has a promise of delivery from the power of sin; of being enlightened so as to perceive the majestic beauty of truth; of being purified so as to be able to love, and find a delight in, whatever is good and holy: he is assured that the wonderful power by which Christ rose from the dead, and sat down at the right hand of God, shall also work in him with corresponding energy; that the eternal Spirit who first animated chaos with life, is to be the constant inmate of his soul; and that while the vast companies of God's saints are gloriously bound together by the operation of his blessing, and the intense power of his grace, he, as one of that society, will participate in the whole weight of glory that shall envelop at the last the triumphant church. Now a man truly feeling himself a Christian, and taking any pleasure in studying the revealed promises of God, cannot fail of finding that such are the mercies and privileges appointed to his state; and finding this, he will not be satis-

fied till he realize them in his state of mind, in his inward convictions, in his character. He will consider it as a dishonouring of his being to remain without the dignity promised; and as a miserable sacrifice of happiness to rest in the lower degrees of faith, when he may rightly aspire to assurance: and this will urge him to new efforts to rise; to overcome the world; to subdue the petulant humours of his nature; to be, indeed, all that God would have him be. But notwithstanding the sincerity of these his holy desires, he finds many difficulties in the work. Neither his temper nor his passions will submit to the power of the Gospel so readily as his mind has acknowledged its truth and its worth. These, aided as they are in the battle by the advices and helps of Satan, he has still to struggle with: the world also, as well from his necessities as his duty, cannot be left; and he must still encounter, therefore, all its opposition to his wishes; must breathe, however dangerous, its atmosphere; must be exposed at one time to the persuasions of ambition, at another, to the silent invasions of care, the irritating suggestions of pride, or the whispers of vanity, and the glozing eloquence of pleasure. Is it to be supposed, that he can resist all these with little difficulty; that he can rise above them by a mere act of the will, because in his mind he knows he ought to do so? No: though every day increasing in

strength, he will still have to lament the too evident signs of a weak and corrupt nature; and were he engaged alone in the work of his salvation, he would surely fall; but the Redeemer himself, the Father, and the eternal Spirit, are all employed about his soul; and when he fears lest he should not persevere, and presents himself before the mercy-seat to pour forth his confessions and his prayers, he is answered by him who has appointed for his people a sure refuge before his altar: 'My grace is sufficient for thee, my strength is made perfect in weakness.'

CHAPTER VII.

THE JUDGMENT.

IN examining what is the probable state of the soul between death and the resurrection, we found that the testimony of Scripture tends very strongly to show that it retains during that period its full and natural consciousness. The question at once arises in our minds, on this view of the subject, what will be its employment throughout that long interval? Can it have any object to pursue? Or will it remain, though conscious, in solemn repose and quietude? There is a much greater practical reason for considering these questions than we should at first sight suspect; and it is this:—the human heart clings to the slightest hope of safety, and on that hope will rest, and satisfy itself, when, indulging in its wilfulness, it neglects every proper and consistent means of security. With the idea of life is intimately associated that of a course of action, pursued by choice, or the free action of the will. It is almost

impossible to think of ourselves as existing, living creatures, and not to believe that we shall be able to act in this way or that; and the mind is thus continually on the point, when thinking of the state between death, and the appearance of the soul before the great Judge, of conjecturing that it may still enjoy the opportunity of putting off the habits of evil it has acquired, and fitting itself in a better manner for the awful trial it must undergo. To this notion the whole of Scripture, and the most obvious conclusions of reason, are plainly and directly opposed.

In the first place, the nature of repentance is such, that it cannot be exercised to any effect in another state; and where there can be no effectual repentance, there can be no hope. Repentance is a change of mind—a change of will—a change of intention. Now it is plain that this change, as to any particular line of conduct, can only take place while we remain under the same circumstances; for suppose when hungry and thirsty we commit some crime to satisfy our wants, and then, when we are satisfied and full, say, we wish we had not committed the fault, it is evident that this our repentance is a very doubtful one, and that we cannot, with any certainty, say, that it springs from a change of mind. But suppose, on the other hand, that we have wrongfully supplied our necessities, and then again fall into a similar

temptation—again feel the gnawings of hunger, or the feverish cravings of thirst, and in the midst of our suffering remember how we before satisfied them, and remembering our crime repent of it, and refuse, notwithstanding the temptation, to commit the sin again, then indeed our repentance is proved to be a true repentance, and we may recognise the power of holiness in our hearts. Suppose again, that a man, full of high and ardent spirits, rejoicing in the vigour of health, and free from fear, passes the proud years of flourishing manhood in the pursuit of pleasure, and then when his nerves loosen—when his blood begins to flow less warmly through his veins—when time fastens on his brow, and his heart loses its confidence of the future; suppose that then he begins to care less about the objects which in the vigour of his strength he pursued with the full devotion of his mind—that he begins to discover that the good they conferred, if any, was a shadowy, fleeting good, and that he regrets accordingly having paid the high price he gave for its enjoyment; is that a true, and hearty repentance?—is it such a one as would lead us to conclude that, if he suddenly recovered his power and energies, he would not resume his former course of dissipation? But suppose, on the other hand, that wisdom gaining the mastery over his passions, brings him to reflection, and that becoming convinced of the folly

of his actions, of their danger, and degrading consequences, he pauses in his course, and then yielding to the suggestions of the Holy Spirit, who is mercifully ever on the watch for men thus pausing, thus reflecting, laments in truth and earnestness his conduct, and still surrounded by temptations, rejects and overcomes them : suppose he does this, then his repentance is a real repentance ; the change in his feelings is a real change, for he has ceased to regard things in the same light—has ceased to take delight in the objects which led him into sin : and he now, by the dictates of his conscience, and the motions of his free will, acting in unison with the motions of the heavenly Spirit, follows the law of righteousness with the same zeal with which he formerly obeyed the instigations of Satan.

By continuing this line of reflection, it will be seen, that when the human soul is cut off by death from all intercourse with the scenes and objects amid which it was nurtured into sin, it cannot effectually repent ; and, that if it grieves and laments, as it needs must, it can only show the anguish of disappointment and dread ; an anguish proceeding from no hatred of its sin—from no newly ingrafted principle of holiness, it now being impossible that it should demonstrate its change of disposition in that only sure way, a change of conduct, a change of affections and pursuits.

The separate state of the soul then is not one in which exertion can be made to alter its condition, when it appears at the bar of judgment, and hence is derived the important principle, that the hour of death, in respect to all the purposes of salvation, is the same as the hour of judgment, for the seal which the Holy Spirit or the devil then puts on the soul, remains on it till the Almighty Judge pronounces its final sentence. This gives us the most awful view of the intermediate state that can be conceived; for we hereby see that it is the hour when no man can work, while it is, at the same time, that in which the soul will behold more clearly than ever the extent both of its folly and its danger.

Repentance, sanctification, the pardon of God, are essentially necessary to the peace of a death-bed; and they must be sought, we have seen, when the soul is perfect master of itself and its will, and when its anxiety to obtain salvation is not the mere consequence of its being sick of the world. The result of the purifying influences of divine grace will then be seen powerfully developed in every idea and action that spring from the soul; and an incontrovertible proof will be thus given that it has undergone a change which the strong language of Scripture only is sufficient to describe; a change truly called, a dying unto sin, and a being new-born unto righteousness. But great as are the

outward effects of the power of holiness when wrought in with the soul, they are greater internally than outwardly. The suggestions of prudence, the working of opposite desires and passions, may often induce a man to overcome evil habits—to sacrifice his wishes—to live regularly, and attend even to many of the ordinary observances of duty; but no suggestions of prudence, no worldly wisdom, however refined, can cure the soul of its inbred sin, or transplant it from the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of light, or withdraw it from the worship of its idols to serve the living and true God. This purification of the soul must be the work of the Holy Spirit, and without this purification, it remains dark and corrupt, whatever be its outward obedience to the laws and suggestions of virtue.

The death-bed usually brings superficial virtue to the test of truth; and the sickening spirit, shrinking and trembling at the prospect of eternity, with such a bad plea on which to claim the pardon of God, strives with all its energies to make its case appear as well as it did when no danger was nigh. To aid it in this effort, the soothing, but false and flattering voice of friendship is not wanting: the occasional acts of kindness it performed are all recalled, and dressed up in their best colours: the sins it deplores are represented

as but half in number and extent to what they in reality were : to make the poor, worthless remnant of life pass off with ease, safety and salvation are promised with liberal kindness; and thus the struggling soul is helped into eternity, and they who have thus aided it in its passage, when their own time comes, remember their principles thus brought into use, and pass off themselves with similar confidence. Generation after generation is thus nurtured in error, and the purposes of death and sin are perfected by those who expect only the pardon of their guilt, and the enjoyment of eternal life.

But though the soul may for a time be deceived as to its real state, it can be deceived no longer than it remains in the body; the moment it quits that, all self-deception vanishes, and there is not an eye bent upon it, which cannot look through all its windings, which cannot pass a correct judgment upon it, and tell to which sphere it of right belongs. The state of the soul thus considered, affords a powerful argument in favour of holiness; for by reflecting how it will appear when no cloud of worldly error surrounds it, when the voices of worldly prejudice and flattery are hushed; when the clear, piercing lament of disturbed consciences shall be the only sound heard in its vast habitation, we can scarcely fail to perceive the necessity of employing our whole strength

in improving not our mere habits, but the principles of action ; not our mere outward conduct, but our souls themselves.

There is another important subject for reflection, connected with the unchangeable character of the soul in its intermediate state. It will not, we have reason to conclude, sleep : what then, since it cannot do any thing to change its character from bad to good in that separate state—what will be its occupation through the many ages of its existence in the world of spirits ? In order to answer this question aright, we must consider that the activity of the soul consists in thought and meditation ; and that, therefore, though it should for ever remain in one place, it might yet exercise its powers with a continually increasing vigour. We can form no distinct conception of the operations of a spirit, not working through the organs of an earthly body ; but we may form a notion of its enjoyments sufficiently clear to satisfy us, that a pure spirit, assured of approaching glory, with no incumbrances of conscience with which to struggle, with no enemy to guard against, but protected within the sanctuary of a tranquil eternity, may have many and deep delights : for what are those pleasures which the pure heart and the strong mind, even here, tell us are supreme above all others ? What are they, but sweet, and oft-repeated, and long communings of one well-ordered

mind with another? What are they but the contemplation of things rendered bright and good by the presence of the Eternal Spirit? Is there any employment so soothing as the uninterrupted memory of happy hours; any pleasure so captivating as the recollection of a happiness which we know shall return to us? And herein we see how the soul, in its separate state, cut off from the world of action, may enjoy almost numberless delights; for there can be little doubt, but that, as it will be made the inhabitant of some region in every way fitted to its particular condition, it will fail in nothing necessary to its contentment. Nor is it at all necessary to suppose, that because it will be separate from the body, it will therefore lose the power of perceiving, or enjoying outward things: more probable is it, that the light from God's throne penetrates through every corner of its home; that the music of heaven reaches it in sweet, assuring sounds of neighbourhood, and that no sign is wanting to convince it that its habitation is but a little lower than the habitations of angels. Again, though there can be no change from bad to good beyond the grave, it is highly probable, that the regenerated soul, which has been becoming more and more perfect throughout its earthly course, will continue so to increase in perfection during that, its intermediate state. The near and constant contemplation of good cannot

but increase its goodness ; and every acquisition it makes must necessarily be attended with an accession of present delight as well as of hope.

Though, therefore, because of the coming of that night in which no man can work, the soul must be made perfect in the righteousness of Christ, and by the regeneration of the Spirit, before it be separated from the body, there is every reason to believe that there is a quickening energy in spiritual holiness, by which it shall, even unto eternity, deepen, strengthen, and enlarge itself, and so be perpetually elevating the soul which it possesses in the scale of being.

Of all that I have said respecting the happiness of the saved, the contrary may be affirmed of the dark and miserable spirits who have passed into eternity unrepenting and unpardoned. But whatever may be the happiness of the one class, or the misery of the other, it is only preparatory to the final decision and appointments of eternal justice. A wide field this for meditation and inquiry, but one in every tract of which thought may gather something to increase its strength—the spirits' motives to the exertion of greater energy. Death, however, which, so far as this world is concerned, is the end of all things, is not so in respect to futurity. It is the termination of one system, but the beginning of another : it closes the eyes to what is at present visible ; it opens them

to what has hitherto been invisible : it is the consummation of weakness, but the origin of an inconceivable might ; the minister of darkness, but the revealer of unfathomable secrets. Instead, therefore, of looking upon death, which the world seems inclined habitually to do, as the end of life, it is not only safer and wiser, but actually more conformable with the truth of things, to view it as the beginning of a new existence, of a species of existence which we can only enter upon through death ; but which, though lying beyond the partition-wall of impenetrable night, is not less real, or less replete with good or evil, than is that which we now live in the flesh.

It is so ordered by divine power, that its first proceeding with man entering on this new portion of his existence, shall be that which will determine his eternal condition ; and it is on this I am about to speak, praying that the considerations to which the subject gives rise may lead the reader yet further, and yet more resolutely on the path of salvation.

That God will judge his creatures, is a truth so conformable with the dictates of reason, so essential to every theory of moral government, that the feelings, the sentiments, the practices of men support it in all parts of the world. What does superstition point her finger at, but judgment written in the heavens, arming itself in the tempest, or walking hand in hand with night ? What is conscience perpetually speaking of, but judgment—a judgment that

shall measure its due to every species of guilt; that shall let nothing escape its keen eye and its sure hold? What would that appeal to the future mean, which men even unenlightened by belief have been continually making? What would the dread of death itself mean, were there not universally an inward conviction of a judgment to come? And this testimony of men's consciences is confirmed by the manifest necessity of the doctrine, to explain the mystery involved in the present state and order of the world. The dishonest gain riches, and possess them to the end: the votary of licentious pleasure grows grey in the pursuit, and laughs, in the lightness and folly of his heart, till death is at hand: a thousand sins, both secretly and openly, are daily committed against God and man, and no punishment is seen to follow: what then is the obvious conclusion?—for we know that the Almighty Ruler of the universe is a just and righteous king; we know that there must be a moral law where there is a just and eternal sovereign; and we also know that there can be no law without exaction of punishment from those who break it:—what, therefore, is the inference we are constrained to draw, when we see sin of every species despising the monitions of conscience, and triumphing in the world year after year?—what, but that the righteous Lord has a judgment in reserve, which will vindicate his broken laws, and bow the proudest sinner to the

earth? Were there no revelation—no Gospel, reason would itself lead to the belief of a divine judgment, not less general than the universal reign of sin, not less particular than the guilt of every individual sinner.

But the word of God, happily for us, leaves nothing of importance to be discovered by the uncertain and capricious operations of human reason. The law is there with its line and rule, the penalties of its breach are clear and determinate. When we pass from the law to the Gospel, this distinctness is not diminished by the sublimer spirituality of the revelation: the righteousness which is by faith, is a righteousness not less capable of definitions and distinctions than the righteousness of the law: the light in which faith stands enshrined, sheds its lustre through the whole body of the grace, and over every branch of moral truth. The law of righteousness, of which the law before given was but the more conspicuous points, shows in clear relief the narrowest lines—the minutest portions of duty and holiness. No case or question can be conceived, to which it does not afford an answer. It establishes all obligations, it unfolds principles which words could not, but which expand at the application of its living light. It is a system of united righteousness and love, and thereby gives eternal strength both to the inward and the outward bands which bind society together.

It is a system combining commands and helps, and in proportion to the distinctness which it gives to every point of holiness, is the fulness of the grace which it pours upon the faculty summoned into action.

Now, if natural reason and conscience establish a law by which we are made amenable to judgment, if the general system of moral government gives birth of necessity to responsibilities, and if wherever there is a law and responsibilities there must be a judgment, then it is plain, even before we come to the positive declarations of the word of God on the subject, that the Gospel dispensation will end in judgment; and further, that this judgment will be commensurate and answerable to the pure and spiritual rule which the Gospel lays down.

In the first place, then, Christ himself, the author of the Gospel, tells us, in terms that admit not of two senses, that the conclusion of that dispensation of which he is the Mediator, will be the assembling of all the tribes and generations of the earth, to receive the sentence of their eternal fate from his mouth. After prophesying the destruction of Jerusalem, which proclaimed the termination of the kingdom of Israel, as founded on the law, and in the covenant of which Moses was the mediator, he passes to the description of that awful day, which will terminate not any temporal dis-

tory of the Lord is then thus described : ' I saw heaven opened, and behold a white horse ; and he that sat upon him was called faithful and true, and in righteousness he doth judge and make war. His eyes were as a flame of fire, and on his head were many crowns ; and he had a name written that no man knew but he himself. And he was clothed in a vesture dipped in blood, and his name is called the word of God. And the armies which were in heaven followed him upon white horses, clothed in fine linen, white and clean. And out of his mouth goeth a sharp sword, that with it he should smite the nations. And he shall rule them with a rod of iron, and he treadeth the wine-press of the fierceness of the wrath of God. And he hath on his vesture, and on his thigh, a name written, King of Kings, and Lord of Lords.' The judgment itself is next depicted in these awfully distinct terms. ' I saw a great white throne, and him that sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heavens fled away ; and there was found no place for them. And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God ; and the books were opened : and another book was opened, which is the book of life ; and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works. And the sea gave up the dead which were in it ; and death and hell delivered up the dead which were in them ; and

they were judged every man according to his works.'

We might adduce numerous other passages of the same nature, and show that even the old prophets, when speaking of the dispensation of the Gospel, made many distinct allusions to its concluding in judgment. Of the fact, therefore, that we shall all stand before the judgment-seat of Christ there can be no doubt; and our next consideration is, how will that great trial of the universe take place, and in what will it consist?

A solemn mystery overhangs all subjects of this nature; and this is owing not so much, perhaps, to any backwardness on the part of the blessed Spirit to make the mystery known, as to our incapacity for comprehending the explanation. In respect to the one we are at present considering, the weakness and the disbelief of men are especially manifest. God has made known to us, how the judgment of the world will be carried into effect. He has instructed us as to every important particular which will occur in that hour of change and tribulation. In the first place, we are told, the Judge will come suddenly and unexpectedly, as a thief in the night: in the next, that he will come in the glory of heaven, and attended by the hosts of heaven: then, that there will be a distinct arrangement of the separate classes of man-

kind : that he will bring their works to their remembrance ; and having done that, will deliver, before the whole vast assembly, their sentence of glory, or eternal condemnation. And what particular is here wanting ? What more, as sinners or as the redeemed of Christ, do we need to know ? What is left imperfect in the solemn picture which the Holy Spirit has drawn ? What more is required to fill the heart with dread at the idea of arriving at that day without the preparation that shall secure an acquittal ? We are inclined to question, perhaps, whether the tremendous scene described will take place visibly. We half doubt, perhaps, whether we shall see with our eyes, and hear with our ears, the terrible glory of the coming Lord, the dread echoes of the archangel's trumpet pealing through the opening vaults of worlds breaking into ruin. But what room is there for these doubts and surmises ? Why should we imagine that God will not make the end of this material world as visible to the senses, as he does his present management of its elements ? Why should we suppose that Christ will not be as manifest as the sun in its glory, when he himself says, that he shall become so manifest ? There is no legitimate reason for these questions. The Lord's own words, and the words of his apostles, may safely be taken as they stand ; and we may rest assured that the clear daylight is not more visible, than will be the awful splendour of heaven coming to judgment.

Being then convinced that the event will take place, and having some means of determining how it will take place, our next inquiry is, in what will the judgment consist? And here the words of the apostle Paul are to be carefully considered. They tell us, that we are to appear before Christ, 'to receive the things done in the body, according to that we have done, whether it be good or bad.' Here it is to be especially observed, that the judgment will not take place till the body and spirit, hitherto kept apart, are re-united; and that then each particular deed we have committed will be brought to light. We hence learn that the sentence to be pronounced will not fall upon us as spiritual creatures merely; that it will not be some increase to the terrors of our consciences; that it will not be in imagination we shall be punished; but that even as we are now, a compound of body and soul, that even as we are now capable of suffering, capable of being stung to madness by mental fear, or tortured by the piercing thrills of bodily agony, so shall we then be; and that the Lord, therefore, may take his choice of our offending being, and chain us to the bottomless pit, amid visible darkness, by fetters of living fire, or drive us, with a worse torture in our souls, to wander up and down the strange regions of unmeasured space. We have next to observe, that it is especially before the judgment-seat of

Christ we shall have to stand; and by this it is shown that we shall be tried in every particular by the rule of the Gospel. God decrees nothing without an especial purpose, without an absolute fitness in the decree; and thus it is with his appointing his Son to be our Judge. He was chosen to be our High-priest, that we might have a High-priest touched with a feeling of our infirmities. He was appointed to be our Judge, because he is the head, the centre, the completion of that grand system which embraces every species of divine truth, which applies to every act that the moral being can perform, which meets every case of obedience or disobedience, and extends, in its application to sin and righteousness, from the beginning to the end of time.

Here, then, we may find an answer to all our questionings respecting the judgment to come. It is by the Gospel we shall be tried—by the Gospel which is in our houses; the great truths of which we were taught in childhood, and which is preached every sabbath. It is by the Gospel, the pure, spiritual Gospel, by the power and the light of which souls are converted to the love of truth, and the whole man changed, that we shall be tried before the judgment-seat of Christ. Would we become prophets to ourselves, then? Would we know what will be our fate in the everlasting realms of futurity? Would we bring the sentence of the mighty

Judge even now within hearing? Let us open the Gospel—see what are its laws—consider the spiritual-mindedness which it enacts, the course of pure, charitable, unselfish action it enjoins: see what it says respecting the service of God and of the world, of faith, repentance, conversion, heavenly affections; and then let us look into our own souls; inquire whether the Spirit of holiness be in them—whether the mind of Christ be there—whether they have the dispositions which indicate the presence and the working of divine grace. From this inquiry into our state of mind, let us pass to the examination of our ordinary course of action; ask ourselves whether our own self-interest be not the ruling motive of all our exertions; try and discover how much we do from the sincere desire of glorifying God, and imitating our Redeemer; number up the actions we have performed from this principle; and then, if we can neither find that we are spiritual in disposition, nor honestly say, that we are imitators of Christ in our conduct, what fate can we look for, when we shall come to be tried by the Gospel? You will not, perhaps, answer this question, reader, even in your own heart; you will endeavour to pass it over, or to keep yourself, for a little momentary ease, in the same state of confusion and darkness in which you have hitherto lived. You will refuse to try and examine yourself by the light of truth, for fear you

should have to alter your present mode of living, to sacrifice some temporal interest, or give more attention to the service of God : and you imagine, while thus living in voluntary forgetfulness of the day of judgment, and of the rule by which you will be tried, that the danger is not so imminent as we tell you, or that you can avert it when it draws near. On what is this notion founded ? On ignorance, the mother, and on vice, the nurse of error. Did you know the Scriptures, you would know that you cannot be saved while you cherish your present worldly dispositions; you would feel convinced that the same hinderances which keep you from the table of the Lord, will shut you out from heaven; and that, if you do not remove them by prayer and a speedy repentance, even the blood of Christ will not avail to procure you pardon before God.

Delay not then to turn with a meek and teachable spirit to the Gospel ; while ignorant of that, you cannot tell the state you are in, or what is required of you. Your ideas of divine mercy will be founded on notions utterly false ; you will look for pardon where no pardon will be granted, and think you are fulfilling whatever is necessary to salvation, when you are not even on the threshold of the kingdom of heaven. If you are resolved to entrench yourself within your love of the world, and rest determined to do nothing more than you have hitherto done to secure the pardon of

God, and advance in your religious profession, I know that no words of mine can overcome that resolution ; but I warn you of the danger of resisting, even for an hour, the plain counsel of the Gospel. The day of judgment may not yet come, but death is not very far distant ; and death will not, cannot, dare not rest, for it is his appointed task, till he carry you into the presence of the Judge. When there, the mystery of iniquity will be revealed, the man of sin be made manifest ; and not one of those secret channels will remain unopened through which Satan has reached the heart, our treacherous wills conniving at his entrance. Nor can it be doubted, but that the Author of our nature will then be fully justified, and sufficient answers given to the sophistry of sin, accusing the constitution of humanity as opposed to the laws of its eternal Parent. At present we successfully refute many of the arguments of conscience, but then conscience will point to the throne and the sceptre of the Judge : here we have time to rest on, when we tremble at eternity, and the innumerable forms of things to divert us from the solemn contemplation of self. But there we shall be surrounded with the sublime realities of elemental, original existence : no intermingling shadows will throw a veil over the deformities of our being, or soften the startling contrast between good and evil. In the midst of revealed eternity, where every thing

shall be known, we shall not remain unknown ;
and the only mantle which the soul can then assume, will either be the livery of the prince of darkness, or the bridal robe of the Redeemer's righteousness.

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CHAPTER VIII.

THE CONCLUSION.

SUCH is the nature of Christianity ; and on this system of united love and wisdom are we called upon to place our confidence as spiritual and immortal beings. Faith in God, and in the efficacy of the means he has provided for our redemption ; purity of heart, sought through the power of the blessed Spirit ; and conformity in word and action to the divine will, are the signs whereby the true believer in this system establishes his claim to the comforts and privileges which it offers. And such is our nature, and the circumstances in which we are placed, that there can be no certainty in any of the methods of pursuing happiness, but this one of Christian faith and obedience. Human life is subjected to so many changes, that one of the first considerations of the wise has ever been, how to fortify the mind against the sudden gusts of passion, and the capricious humours of the world. The exercise of reason strengthens it, and

a well-cultivated intellect has resources in itself against many of those untoward events, which plunge the idle and sensual in despair. But the stream of thought can never rise higher than its source, and however prepared the philosopher may be to meet ordinary troubles, he still remains exposed to a vast variety of trials, which bear directly on the mind, or some of its most important affections. When these are to be met, reason partakes of the general confusion, and the whole man, defenceless and stricken with despair or disgust, arraigns the wisdom which gave him such an existence. To impart the principle of permanence then to any species of human happiness, the source of strength must be sought, not simply in an appeal from the world, or from our passions, to the mind, but from the weakness of the mind itself, to an independent and unchanging power. And this power is the benevolence of God. Good of every kind has in this a common and absolute origin; and in proportion as it loses its direct and simple likeness to this, its creative fountain, it ceases to be good. To seek God, therefore, is to seek unmixed and perfect good; to be at peace with him, is to be free from whatever opposes good; to know him is to have learned by experience the nature of genuine happiness; to enjoy his love is to be so replenished with delight, that no portion or faculty of our being can remain un-

reached or unsatisfied by that heavenly nourishment.

Were not our minds sadly diverted from the path of wisdom by the temptations of evil, we should find, in this simple truth, ample instruction for our conduct through life. But ever disposed to believe that happiness demands variety of enjoyment, and that the ministers of pleasure must be as numerous as our capricious desires, we can rarely rise to the conception of one eternal, all-sufficient source of good; or satisfy the yearnings of our hearts by the conviction, that in the unity of eternal beneficence exists the means of satisfying the innumerable wants, desires, and aspirations of its countless creations. So manifestly necessary, however, is this conviction to our comfort and security, that its development in the mind ought to be promoted by the most earnest efforts. Let us feel our souls rising with the animating sentiment of love to the Creator, and let this sentiment work itself out in holy expressions and a sanctified course of action, and even the life which we lead in the body will be deeply imbued with good. The source of happiness and consolation lying far beyond the reach of evil, fear can no longer torment the heart; and the balmy breath of hope will heal every wound inflicted by worldly disappointments. Truth will have a positive existence, a real beauty, and the intellect will find inexpressible delight in receiving

it as it comes fresh clothed from the throne of God. With an internal being so richly nourished, and such motives to the right employment of its energies, our general system of action can scarcely be erroneous. Every moral feeling will have its just and appropriate aim; desire will acknowledge the paramount law of purity; and rectitude give grace and excellence to all the communications of social intercourse. Neither hate nor rivalry, neither deceit nor the power of the world, can inflict any vital injury where this is the case. Thus a degree of security will be enjoyed unattainable by the sublimest inventions of human policy. Tranquillity, the happy result, will leave the heart open to the perception of good, under whatever form it may exist; the invisible influences of heaven will be felt in its innermost core, and the graciousness of the Almighty Father will sweeten the whole cup of life. When it seems good to him that the faith or the stability of the soul should be tried, and afflictions of this or that kind are permitted to press in, nature confesses the chastening hand of the parent, and the wounded heart bleeds freely; but the convincing sense of mercy remains unweakened, and it is speedily found, that 'he that goeth forth and weepeth, bearing precious seed, shall, doubtless, come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him.' Psalm cxxvi. 6.

These are the blessed effects of Christian faith

as the foundation of present happiness. Its influence on the soul looking forward to the approach of death, or struggling in its grasp, are not less remarkable. It is the part of true wisdom to regard life in its continuity and entirety: to view one season as the parent of the next; and present events and actions as the basis of our condition in futurity. At the close of our career, the state of our minds, indicated by peculiar inclinations, thoughts, and wishes, is an abstract of the whole; memory, conscience, reason—every moral and intellectual faculty, deriving its activity from the eventful past. Such being the case, of what importance is it, that we possess through life some means of sanctification, which shall act as a sovereign remedy both of the impurity of our nature, and of the imperfection of whatever we say or do! What immense advantages must not the possession of such a principle promise against the hour of dissolution! How tranquil must not the spirit feel which has for years experienced the purifying influence of divine grace, and knows that whatever it brought forth was cleansed from the beginning in its regenerating stream!

A consideration of this kind can only fail to excite reflection, when the heart is utterly insensible to the claims of God and eternity; for if we simply regard death as a rendering back of the soul to Him who gave it, surely we are bound to

rejoice at the proffer of its purification; it was bestowed upon us, a being pure and precious in the eyes of the giver; and shall we not, if it be possible, render it back not wholly unworthy of his favour? But if we add to this notion of death those considerations which proceed from the belief of our immortality, the subject becomes still more interesting; for what idea can we form of existence, which would not be intollerable to the mind if unassociated with the hope of peace? What species of happiness is conceivable, to which inward satisfaction, freedom from remorse, and a sense of love, are not essential? In both instances, then, the purification of the soul is a necessary object of pursuit to a rational and responsible creature like man. Without this, he can neither be fit for God, nor capable of happiness; the longer he exists, the less will be his prospect of good; and the enlargement of his faculties will be but the increase of his capacity for evil. Let him, on the other hand, have experienced the gracious working of the heavenly Spirit; let him feel sanctified, reconciled to the Author of his being, and to himself, and eternity will brighten before him in all its depths, and beam forth promises of limitless delight and glory.

But where are we to find, or how are we to seek the means of sanctification, if we go not to the Gospel and its Author? Study nature as we may,

it can only afford us fresh instances of the Almighty's power and wisdom ; it can never bring us nearer to his throne : it may fill us with admiration, but wonder is connected with no source of consolation, no invitation of mercy, no intelligence that can lessen the fears of a troubled conscience. Nor has it ever appeared, from all that we know of the reasonings of philosophers, that the mere laws of the universe can ever lead the mind to a personal, individual conviction of God's paternity. Still less able are we to find in any view of the system of nature, a provision made for the purifying or regenerating of that which may have become corrupt in the moral or spiritual being. Direct the eyes of a conscience-stricken man to the heavens when most resplendent with stars, or lead him in spring or summer into green solitudes, where peace and delight reign undisturbed, and nature shall seem to invite him to her bosom, will he find comfort in the contemplation of the beauty which surrounds him ? will he feel himself more secure, less exposed to punishment, less amenable to the laws which he has broken ? If there be any truth in the most celebrated delineations of human passion, he will only be impressed with a deeper conviction of his misery, and a more acute sense of the divine displeasure. In vain will he ponder the revelations of glory made by the starry night, to find a regenerating principle for

his fallen spirit : in vain will he open his breast to the soft wind, or listen to the murmuring of placid streams, or make his bed of odorous flowers, to draw from the energies of nature, a cordial for virtue, blighted and undone by sin. Despair follows the attempt, and his last state is worse than the first. Nor can any better success attend an appeal to moral truth, however beautifully personified in the deductions and appeals of genuine philosophy. Virtue enthroned in that mystic sphere of beauty, where light and life are one, may fill the heart with profound convictions of her worth and excellence, but still leave it weak and despairing. The queenly grace and dignity of her bearing, the lustre of her beauty, the spotless purity of her dwelling, will, if really beheld, almost extinguish the flame of love in the sense of unworthiness. And this may be said in reference to every system of ethics. It is of little use to make us acquainted with goodness, unless a way be opened for its attainment; and that the simple knowledge of the abstract principle is this way, no self-examining and virtuous mind will ever be made to feel. The dispositions which qualify us for obeying truth and virtue, can never be imparted by a being like ourselves, however good and wise himself : nor can they be generated by the mind itself; for how can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit, or a fountain send forth both sweet and bitter water ?

Thus left, then, with God only for our resource, let us humbly and gladly go to him ; let us thankfully receive his Gospel as full and perfect in its instructions, and seek with ceaseless assiduity for that sovereign remedy of sin, the grace of the Eternal Spirit. By this means alone can we prepare ourselves for death, because by this means alone can we secure that regeneration of the soul, without which it is impossible to see God. And the importance of this principle being so evident, let us carefully consider the best method of giving our hearts the advantage of its application.

Death, we have seen, at the beginning of this discourse, is not to be regarded as the termination of our conscious existence ; and the Gospel, as we have further seen, contains an offer of salvation founded on the most reasonable laws of united justice and mercy. Bearing these truths in mind, we ought surely to feel willing to subject ourselves to whatever is necessary in the way of profitable and holy discipline ; and first we must employ every means in our power to overcome the world,—the proud, sophistical, and sensual world,—which by a subtle process of abstraction, the author of evil often draws entire into our hearts. And to effect this, the most diligent use must be made of those means of grace, the efficacy of which we acknowledge as an act of faith. The habitual study

of the Scriptures is a sure and comfortable mode of fortifying our souls : it replenishes the strength they lose in their hard struggles with temptation, as daily bread our daily exhausted vigour. It supplies us with ready arguments, with an under-current of experience ; with precepts that have been steeped in the fountain of love, and motives that apply, with unchanging force, to all seasons, circumstances, and characters. Prayer will be valued as a means of safety, in proportion as the mind becomes imbued with the knowledge and the love of Scripture ; and it is a means of safety so fit and ready for all occasions, and of such known efficacy, that he may rightly be charged with his own ruin who neglects to employ it. If the world surround us with danger, reason teaches us to flee to God ; if we have sinned, to ask his forgiveness ; if we be conscious of mercies received, to bless and magnify his name : and if we would renew from time to time the energies of our souls, or give them a general dignity of temper, freedom of thought, and firmness of purpose, assuredly there can be no better method of effecting this, than that of holding communication by sanctified addresses with the Almighty Father ; the very dignity of the act being eminently calculated to elevate the soul with a sense of worth and holiness. In the state of feeling produced by these exercises, the Christian has an immense advantage over the world ; for

his hopes, though stretching far away into a region but dimly discovered by the eye of sensual minds, have a clear and direct course when followed by the keen, observing eye of the enlightened understanding; and if they be compared as to their substantiality with those of the world, who will venture to say, that they are not infinitely superior in this respect also? Hope is but the expectation, the desire of happiness mingled with a certain anticipating promise of its attainment. Hope has invariably a relation to the prospect of increased enjoyment. Now what promises does the world give for the food of hope? The very best belong only to satisfactions which can endure but for a very limited period, and which are always to a certain degree weakened and modified by the drawbacks upon their realization, produced through contradictory occurrences. The hope of the Christian, on the other hand, has none of these drawbacks, is mingled with none of those fears respecting the shortness of the duration of happiness; but like a plant, whose roots are shot deep into the soil, cares little for the storm of the night, or of the winter.

A question, it is true, may be thus put: you talk of hope, you describe it as sufficient to keep the heart awake with perpetual influxes of new and happy thoughts; you say that the Christian has more enjoyment, even in the present world, than the rest of men; that he has a sufficient reward

for all the trials he may have to endure, the self-denials to which he must expose himself, the sacrifice of those wishes and inclinations which other men gratify without control ; in saying this, your proof of the soundness of the principle is, that he has the hope of a future existence, and that he enjoys a peculiar intercourse with heaven ; but how is humanity—how is the heart of man, or even his mind, to connect so completely the present state of things with the future, as to enable him to perform his duties patiently here, supported simply by the consideration of the effect its performance will have on his condition hereafter ? To answer this question by saying that the Holy Spirit, through its heavenly assistance, affords sufficient strength to our nature for the fulfilment of the task, would not show the matter in any clearer light to the apprehension of the world ; nor would it, indeed, be the whole answer which the nature of the subject demands. There is, in fact, a connecting link between heaven and earth, which binds those two great provinces together in close union, so far as the principle on which it depends is allowed to operate : that link is the triumphant—the glorified humanity of Christ ; and the believer whom the mass of mankind suppose to be looking through the vast and empty regions of space, to discover some undefined abode of beings whose qualities he knows not, and of whose happiness he

can consequently form no idea, has all the time the eye of his soul fixed on the person of his Redeemer, who, though dwelling in heaven, has the form of man, and who, though robed in the eternal majesty of the word of God, still displays the wounds which he suffered when, as the Lamb of God, he was put to death for the sins of mankind; and with his eyes thus bent on his exalted Lord with his heart impressed by the solemn assurance that he has an individual share in the effects of his sufferings, he has a help to his contemplations which supports him through every effort that his mind makes to reach the regions of light in which his destiny shall one day place him.

This being the case, we find that the difficulty, the almost incomprehensible mystery which attaches to the idea of man's conversing with heaven, is founded on a false view of the subject; for while it is truly impossible that by the efforts of his limited mind, he should find out the perfections of God, or hold communion with those beings of light and purity, who dwell around him, it is perfectly consistent with reason to believe, that when the whole being of a man, his soul—the vital principle of his existence—is renewed, he may be fit for this holy and sublime exercise. For what is there then to prevent his seeking or enjoying it? What is heaven but the dwelling-place of God—the temple of holiness and delight, in which he

awaits the return of the beings whom he has created, to receive the fulness of glory at his hands? And who is God, but the great Father of our race; he from whom are derived all the blessings we enjoy? and what need we then to doubt, but that we may know and hold converse with him, when the barrier is removed which has been raised up by sin? What is there in his attributes which would prevent our approaching him, were it not for our guilt? Would his power? No: that, his awful attribute, is perpetually exerted to keep us in safety, and uphold the vast and glorious system which surrounds us; not to drive us from his presence. And what are his mercy, his love, and goodness, in all their forms, continually employed about, but in the establishment or promotion of plans expressly intended to gather us within the sanctuary of heaven? And what, on the other hand, is there in our own nature,—put away the base adjunct of sin, clear the soul of that load of corrupt, false feeling which surrounds it on every side,—what is there then in our nature, to keep us from holding intercourse with heaven? Are not our eyes, sunk as we are in sin, ever directed upward, as to the seat of all the light and happiness for which we sigh? Are not our thoughts ever stretching far beyond the remotest visible sphere of heaven, and searching, like the busy explorers of new regions, for some passage to the paradise it en-

shrines? Now certain we may be, that we should feel none of these tendencies, none of these yearnings and exalting impulses, were it not far more proper to our nature and original destiny, to be advancing towards, and holding intercourse with heaven, than it is to remain grovelling on the earth. Remove, then, that which is foreign to our nature, destroy sin, put the soul, with its noble faculties and dispositions in a state of freedom to obey its proper tendencies, and every desire, every thought and emotion will have an elevating power—will, like so many bright, pure flames, ascend towards the Parent Source of life, lifting up the soul by the force of their activity.

The first hour of sincere penitence is the true commencement of our intercourse with God, of our conversation in heaven; for those prayers and sighs which we send up to the throne of mercy, are not breathed in vain: they win the ears of God and of Christ; they awaken the attentive ministers of their grace and providence; all the inhabitants of heaven rejoice as they behold the countenance of the glorified Redeemer brightening with increased effulgence, while he receives those prayers of another of the souls for which he suffered: and then the Eternal Spirit himself becomes present to it, and the vast distance which before separated that soul from heaven, is lost in the light which gradually grows around it. The consciousness of an ac-

cepted repentance inspires new hopes, and quickens the mind into new exertion : the peace of God, surpassing the understanding by its mysterious sweetness, gives confidence in the pursuit of a higher degree of holiness ; and as the soul increases in its earnestness, as its endeavours are enlarged and multiplied, and the knowledge of heavenly truth deepens into spiritual convictions, thought invests itself more and more readily in the guise of prayer ; and as it ever continues ascending towards heaven, so is the Almighty ever ready to receive it, returning those addresses of penitence and love with new gifts of grace, new assurances of happiness, new revelations of his glory. Now in all this, grand as is the prospect which it opens to the rational creature, what is there for which the human soul, put into its proper condition, set right as to its relations with its Creator, is not fitted ? What is there in it to which aught but sin can be a hinderance ? And what is the process which it describes, but that process by which the power of sin is gradually overcome and destroyed ?

Reconciliation is the great object intended by every instrument of good given to the world either by the wisdom and benevolence of chosen men, or by the direct operation of the Almighty's mercy. There are everywhere marks of a fierce conflict begun in the earliest times, and still carried on throughout the universe between one power and another, of which conflict the warring of the ele-

ments, the wearing of the earth into partial ruin and disorder, are emblems; the true contention—the originating cause of all the evil—being the enmity existing between one part of the moral, the spiritual universe, and another—the hostility introduced through sin between God and man. Now wherever wisdom has asserted its divine origin, there it has struggled to invent some process by which this hostility might be removed, or its effects diminished: wherever there has been a glimpse of the knowledge of truth, there some system of reconciliation has been conceived and attempted; and all those inventions, in fact, all those struggles and efforts which are made, as mankind advance in civilization, to lessen the force, and keep down the growth of evil, are but so many acknowledgments that there is hostility between the Giver of good and those who need it; and that the greatest of all benefits and blessings which could, by any possibility, be conferred on the world, must be the means by which a reconciliation may be effected between its people and that mighty Source of life and happiness. Now the Gospel is that very system of reconciliation required; it began in the placability of the offended Father—in his willingness to be appeased: it was carried into effect by him to whom the work of creation was itself committed, and who must needs, through the benignity of his nature, desire to see the harmony in which

it arose restored ; and it is carried on by the mighty Being who, springing from the Father and the Son, acts continually after that sublime rule by which he is ever perfecting the will of the one, and the work of the other.

To a person whose mind is exercised in the careful study of these things, the world can present few dangers which have not been anticipated in the thoughts and counsels of his heart : nor are there any which, when they arrive, can shake its faith in the promised help of divine grace : and the struggle against evil being thus effectually carried on, the mind may begin, with some hope of success, to resist the fear of death, by contemplating the entrance upon eternity, and the consequences of judgment. ' The night is far spent, the day is at hand,' will be its motto ; and the darkness with which, in its sensual apprehension of existence, futurity seemed enveloped, will gradually lessen. A man can scarcely venture to contemplate death while it is the worst calamity he can suffer ; and some advance, therefore, in spiritual-mindedness is absolutely necessary to this exercise of the thoughts. But let us feel it probable that happiness and glory may be the immediate consequence of our dissolution, and there is no longer any difficulty in the undertaking which may not easily be overcome : for why should we refuse to contemplate this probability of good, while we so

eagerly catch at the least probable shadow of good in all other instances? Why should every change of state that may possibly lead to an advance of fortune command our constant attention, and this greatest of all changes, which may certainly secure us the highest glory, procure no consideration in our minds? To look forward to death, therefore, is as consistent with our general habits of thought, as it is essential to our safety; and the wise and holy will not fail to exercise themselves in the frequent contemplation of its approach. But in these serious endeavours to realize the sense of their mortality as creatures of the earth, and their superiority to death as children of God, they will find the necessity of beginning the observation of many circumstances hitherto unnoticed. Time must be questioned: it must be seen whether he is likely to bear much longer our burdens patiently, or whether it may not be necessary for us to ease him of the load, and look at once to eternity for help. The heart must be examined as to its affections and desires, lest faith, taken by surprise, should sink, when we have conquered for ourselves, under our fear for others. Our ruling inclinations, the principal aim of our labours, the ordinary tenor of our ideas and general conversation, will also require careful inspection, it being often found, that under some one or the other of these lies, carefully concealed, the subtle poison which our great enemy

trusts to as his last resource. This preliminary work performed, the mind being furnished with just views of life, and reasons for contented resignation to the will of God, death itself may be looked at with calm and deliberate feeling; may be questioned as to his power, the signs of his approach, and the mysteries he has to reveal. But this must be attempted with caution. Death can never be otherwise than terrible to the natural man; and unless despair, or some strange convulsion of the mind have wholly blinded or perverted nature, we must continue to tremble, as long as we live in the flesh, at the mention of his power. Using, therefore, the care and forethought which becomes us in such a case, let us not be too self-confident to examine our state before we venture to hold converse with death. It is very possible to familiarize ourselves with his name; to store the memory with a variety of notions and sayings on the subject, without forming the least conception of its true importance; and this is the usual consequence of commencing, unprepared, the study of such a theme. Conscience urges us to the attempt, and we satisfy it by flinging a cloak of words over the object of our fears; and thenceforward regard it as any other idea, to which our own expressions only have given a substantial existence. But if we do not employ this species of artifice, and the thoughts of death are allowed to operate

with uncontrolled force upon the mind, then it is in danger of failing beneath the unusual burden of melancholy reflection, and of letting in that host of terrifying images which derange the whole process of moral reasoning. It is, therefore, far from wise to put any force upon nature, or to compel the mind to a familiarity with thoughts of death, till nature itself and the intellect have undergone the purification of the Spirit. Then only, can reason calmly survey the various provinces of argument into which this subject runs, and regard death in its true character, as the instrument of a divine dispensation.

Thus some preparation is necessary, even to the commencement of that study and contemplation which it is usually supposed may be begun at any moment, and in almost any state of thought. But the mind, sobered by sincere sorrow for sin, and elevated by meditation on God's power and mercy, has learnt how to estimate the value of its presentiments, and how to employ to its profit those mingled feelings, which rise at the mention of death. It has, therefore, in this case, no extraneous or undefined terrors with which to struggle: that shadow of darkness, which breeds a thousand hideous phantoms for the natural man, vanishes in the light of knowledge; and the soul is consequently at liberty to combat with its whole strength against the real threatenings of the expected change.

The sooner this can be done the better ; and the proper method of commencing the struggle is to set apart some special seasons of retirement, which shall be so sacred from intrusion of every kind, that the shutting of the door of our closet shall be like the closing of the tomb upon the world and its concerns. It may be that the mind will at first hesitate before yielding to such an idea, but to overcome its repugnance to this imaging of our final departure, is a part of Christian discipline, and tends to infuse a most wholesome solemnity of feeling. When thus secluded from all appeals to the lust of the eye and the pride of life, the soul, previously prepared for the task, will easily discover how little it depends upon the world for happiness, how deceptive have been the best prospects it offered, and how few reasons it has to regret that a termination to its connexion with this state of things is near at hand. In this mood of thought, it may seasonably ask itself, should I lose any thing, could I make my home in this tranquil retirement, unsolicited by temptation, untried by care, instead of being again whirled about in the vortex of society? Should I lose any thing, if from this serene solitude I were admitted, in vigour and purity, to the company of just men made perfect, instead of being sent back to hold converse with those who are as toil-worn, as weak as myself, and as little instructed in genuine wisdom as I was

in the worst days of my folly? Still further: could I have any cause to lament, if instead of my opening my door, and letting in the busy voices of the world, and allowing myself to be drawn by the strange fascinations of the sound into a new covenant with hope and pleasure, God should open to me the door of those mansions which Christ has prepared for his people, and admit me at once into a state of imperishable glory? Now what answer can be given to questions like these, but that which faith dictates; and may it not be reasonably believed, that by thus examining ourselves, at stated periods of solemn thought, and in deep retirement, we may attain by degrees to a true notion of death, and of the mode in which it ought to be met? For in such a seclusion, and with the mind intent on the passage from time to eternity, the heart will not fail to suggest all it would have us remember respecting the natural ties of affection, and the duties we owe to kin and kind; so that the argument of nature will be complete, and if we can reply to it in that sound and comforting spirit of wisdom which the apprehension of divine truth bestows, the victory will, without doubt, be sure in the actual day of trial.

An effort should next be made to view the several divisions of time; the alternations of the seasons, of day and night, as bringing us to so many stations on the high-road to eternity, at any

one of which our part of the journey may be completed. The mind will thereby learn to calculate in a less worldly manner on future prospects, will gradually lose tormenting anxieties and mistrusts, and habitually place itself in a posture of defence against surprise. This state of feeling is as unlike that produced by the mere sense of the uncertainty of life, as is the well-calculated caution of the merchant, to the helpless despondence of a disheartened gamester; and the consequences will be as different. While melancholy, desperation, or cold indifference is the fruit of the one, the produce of the other are sobriety and a cheerful regularity of purpose. It is soon found that the grandest objects of life may be secured in a comparatively limited period; and that, as the will of the Creator and the rule of his providence do alone determine the measure of human existence, it is both most wise and most pious to await, in tranquil readiness, the appointed season of departure.

In order to keep the mind from growing weary with counsels reiterated in the same form, or with images and notions that may lose their strength in the frequent labour of self-examination, care should be taken, in the next place, to refresh the heart with large supplies of those nectarine specimens of heavenly wisdom, which appear given in the Scriptures for this especial purpose, and which are also to be met with in many of the writings of

Christ's followers and ministers, in every age of the church. This is not to be done as matter of security only, but for comfort and enjoyment, for the exercise of healthy sympathies, for the encouragement of faith seeking to cast out fear by the power of love. The happiest results may be looked for from such a study of what inspired and holy men have thought, when contemplating the destiny appointed for all living. Wisdom smiles in the affluence of beauty at beholding humanity triumphing over death: it has been the grandest object of her efforts to show the possibility of such a consummation, and through the most complex of her theories, the silver chord of life has ever been the clue she most sought to possess and follow to the end. Immortality was the reward she asked for, and promised to virtue, even when she had least to hope for; and her sons were led on to the last, in the holy expectation of everlasting homes. 'If it were not so, I would have told you,' she seemed to say, when they doubted their destination to glory; and now that the truth is fully known, she rejoices in the power which it has given her not only over vice and error, but over every thing that could depress or discourage, for any length of time, the heart of her humblest follower. The sweet tones of angelic harps appear vibrating in the discourses of the genuine Christian philosopher: a holy charm attends the communication

of thought from soul to soul, intent on the contemplation of heaven; and the peace which thence diffuses itself around, is like the peace of the sanctuary when the evening sacrifice had been offered up, and the indwelling guardian of the temple closed its gates with their sweet anthem, 'The Lord that made heaven and earth, bless thee out of Zion.'

But there is another means of strength and comfort, yet greater than any of the former in itself, and necessary also to the proper efficacy of every other. This is, that earnest looking to Christ himself, which inspires the soul with a lively apprehension of the highest instances of heavenly love, and confutes every doubt and adverse sentiment by that clearest of demonstrations, 'He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?' With the triumph of a Saviour to contemplate, how can the soul droop or languish at the thought of death? how can it remain unwilling to tread that passage to immortality, which he himself hath made straight? or how be backward to depart when it knows that to leave the world is to be with the Lord?

The happy result of this holy and persevering preparation for death, is a tranquillity of soul which confers dignity as well as confidence, and gradually elevates the mind above the sordid cares,

the strifes and sensuality of the world. As life flows on, the bounteous Father of mercies pours fresh blessings into the stream : the heart gladdens with new joy ; and as the strength of the outward man still fails, that of the inward man demonstrates daily its increasing energies. A clearer knowledge of heavenly mysteries gives stability to faith, however ardent its aspirations ; and increasing purity of disposition and sanctity of thought, affords those signs of a renewed nature, which satisfy the soul of its safety under circumstances the darkest and most trying. Death comes at length, but it surprises not : it has been contemplated under the worst forms it can assume ; under that which it wore when it mounted the cross of Christ, and struck its arrows into the heart of him who knew no sin : under that which it took when it crushed heroic bands of martyrs under its chariot-wheels, or filled their dungeons with its darkness : it has been viewed as the constant associate of humanity, as the desolation of happy hours, as the foe of whatever fears change or separation ; and come, therefore, as it may, it cannot astonish by its terrors : the soul has prepared itself for the last great trial of its fortitude ; the spirit of life and truth is ready with its balm ; and Christ, who had only gall and vinegar offered him in his bleeding agony, leaves not his dying disciple without the choicest offerings of love. The hour of suffering hastens

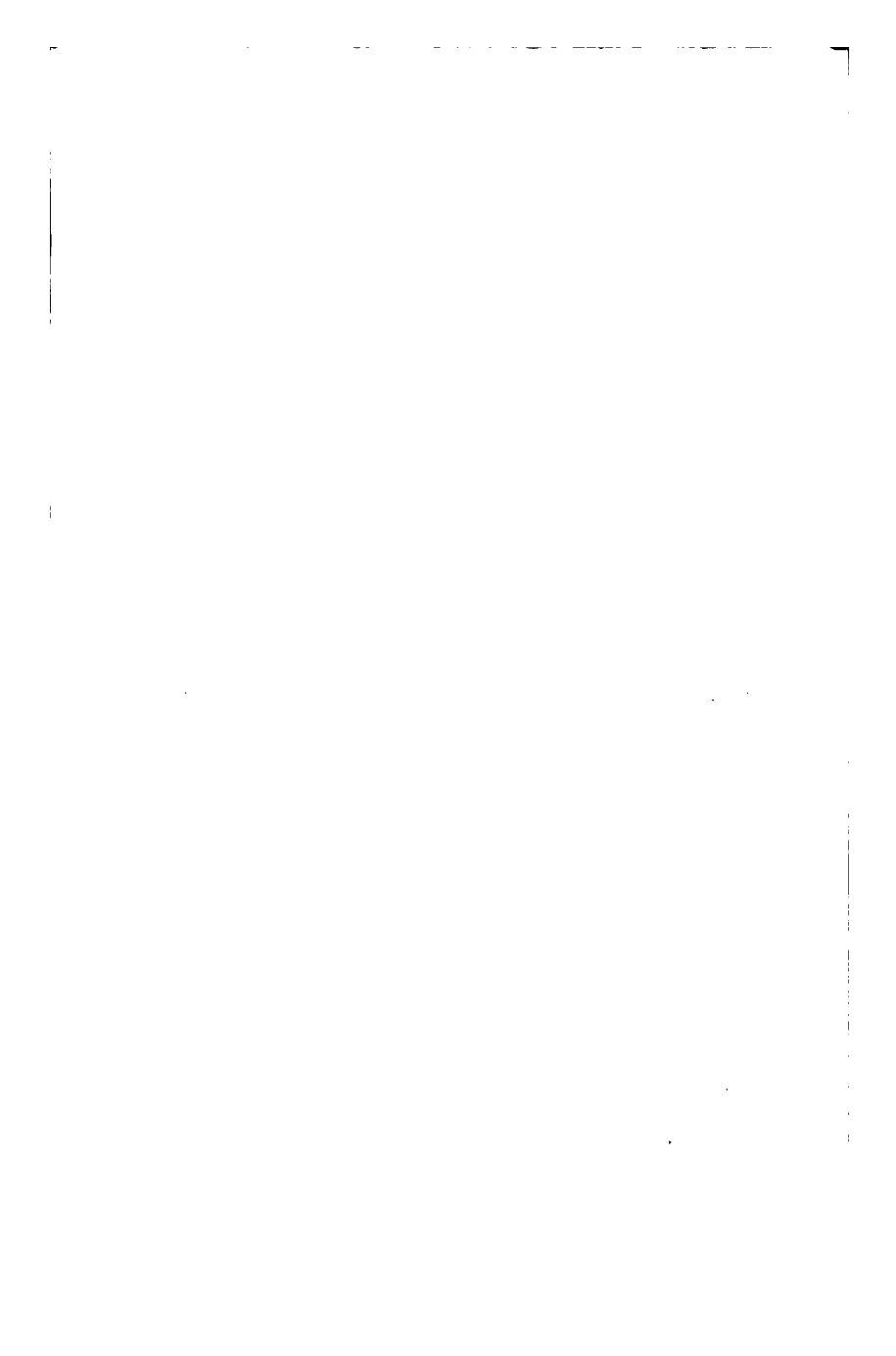
to its close : life persists not in its hold of such a perishing thing as the earthly frame ; and the soul, freed from its painful bondage, passes into eternal realms. There it finds God and its Saviour ; and the measureless fields of glory, its present, future, and everlasting home, invite it as an heir, ripe in age, to its destined inheritance.

And am I, O my soul, appointed to an end like this ? Am I immortal, and have I been offered the pardon of my sins, and called to salvation by the Son of God ? Are those bright regions where love reigns in unshadowed beauty, prepared for my reception, as a child of the Most High ? Shall this spirit, by which I think and feel, no more droop under care, or tremble at anticipated pain ? Shall it be free as the happiest tenant of the blithesome air ; rich as the first angels in the knowledge of truth ; pure like him who redeemed it ? May I, indeed, look forward to the hour when the benign countenance of my Almighty Father, and of Jesus my Saviour, will wear no sign of sorrow or anger on my account, when their voice shall pronounce me blessed, and their decree place me near their throne ? And is the gracious dispensation by which these wondrous offers are made to me, comprehensive enough to embrace those with whom I have ever wished to share all happiness ? Are the provisions of mercy sufficiently large to let me think of their redemption, their immortality

and glory as well as my own? May I, through this inexpressibly comforting system of grace and love, look forward to eternity as the very bosom of home sympathies, and as holding in reserve for me, and for those who are so dear to my soul, treasures that shall enrich us for ever? May I comfort myself on this ground of faith, when years seem of such quick growth, and days of glad commemoration are but so many memorials, that a pillar of the house is shaken,—may I look into my soul, and find therein written as an exact counterpart to the reckonings of time, the ever-accumulating promises of the Almighty Spirit? Thou hast taught me to do so, O thou Father of all mercies; and I will lay thy Gospel to my heart till it melt away its hardness, and leave no trace of unbelief: I will endeavour to apprehend my Saviour with all the faculties thou has given me; and so to join myself unto him, by faith and obedient love, that his heavenly Spirit may become the living principle of my being. O merciful Father, give me power thus to learn the efficiency of the Gospel and grace of Christ; then shall I henceforth live in peace, free from the tyranny of fear, or the agitations of doubt; serene and steadfast in the pursuit of good, and cheered in all the trials of my strength, of my heart, my mind, and spirit, by the assurance that thy promises will

be perfected, and that thou wilt make me to triumph at last in the complete victory over evil, and the full attainment of pure, unchanging happiness.

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doom, beyond reverse, to die. But if it be thus certain that death is the common lot of all—the great result of life—it must surely be the part of a rational creature like man to inquire, what is death? and having answered this question, to consider what kind of preparation should be made for his approach, and by what considerations his terrors are most likely to be diminished. These inquiries I take for the subject of the present discourse.

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